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# THE NEAR AND THE FAR

*By the same author*

THE ORISSERS  
THE 'CLIO'  
STRANGE GLORY

*The*  
NEAR and the FAR

*containing*  
THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER  
&  
THE POOL OF VISHNU

.by  
L. H. MYERS



JONATHAN CAPE  
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE  
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## P R E F A C E

THIS is not a historical novel, although the action is placed in the time of Akbar the Great Mogul (who was a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth's), nor is it an attempt to portray Oriental modes of living and thinking. I have done what I liked with history and geography as well as with manners and customs. Facts have been used when they were useful, and ignored or distorted when they were inconvenient. Few of my characters bear the names of real people, and of these the only person drawn with any regard for historical truth is the Emperor.

In choosing sixteenth-century India as a setting, my object was to carry the reader out of our familiar world into one where I could — without doing violence to his sense of reality — give prominence to certain chosen aspects of human life, and illustrate their significance. It has certainly not been my intention to set aside the social and ethical problems that force themselves upon us at the present time. On the contrary, my hope has been that we might view them better from the distant vantage-ground of an imaginary world.

The writing of this novel has spread over a period of about ten years. The first volume, *The Near and the Far*, was followed in 1931 by *Prince Jali*, and in 1934 these two books were published again — together with a further instalment — in a single volume, called *The Root and the Flower*. The rest of the tale, which now appears for the first time, is being published under the title *The Pool of Vishnu*. It is also included in the present volume, which contains the whole story.

May, 1940

L. H. M.

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# THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER—I

## THE NEAR AND THE FAR

### I

LITTLE Prince Jali stepped on to the balcony and looked down upon the plain in awe. It was true that from the tower of his father's palace at home there was an even wider view; but that view was familiar, this one was full of mystery. The wall of this strange palace went down and down, until it merged into the sweeping side of the fort; the fort itself crowned the summit of a hill; and the bare rock of the hill continued a precipitous descent down into the River Jumna. The red glitter of sunset lay upon the river; across the water shady groves alternated with sun-swept patches of millet and corn; beyond stretched the desert.

For the last two years of his life — and he was now twelve — the desert had held Jali under a spell. Nearly every evening at home he would climb up into the tower to gaze upon it. Beyond the roofs, beyond the green of irrigated fields, beyond the glistening palms and the dark clumps of citron, cypress, and mango — beyond the little world that he knew there stretched that other world which his eye alone could reach. There it lay, a playground for the winds, a floor for the light of evening to flow along, the home of mirage and coloured airs.

It was a region that seemed to promise him a disembodied nimbleness, an unearthly freedom. Its very boundaries were unsubstantial — lines of hills pencilled so lightly along the horizon that noonday melted them into the white-hot sky. Only at sunset did those hills become real. Then it was that they emerged serenely, yet with melancholy, out of nothingness into beauty. Cliffs, battlements, ranges, then took on a substance just solid enough to catch the tints of gold and rose that streamed through the air. The watery glitter of mirage was withdrawn from about their feet. They gave, in their remoteness, a measure of the desolate space in between. But this lasted for a few minutes only. Swiftly rising, the dusk submerged them, and what had been hidden day-long under the glare from above was now drowned in a darkness from underneath. Night rolled across the plain, sharp stars pricked the blue; in a moment nothing was left but the twin darkness of earth and sky.



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For the last six days Jali had been travelling over the desert and disappointment had befallen him — disappointment, but not disillusion. He clung to the truth of appearances as something equal to the truth of what underlay them. There were two deserts: one that was a glory for the eye, another that it was weariness to trudge. Deep in his heart he cherished the belief that some day the near and the far would meet. Yes, one day he would be vigorous enough in breath and stride to capture the promise of the horizon. Then, instead of crawling like an insect on a little patch of brown sand, swift as a deer he would speed across the filmy leagues; the wind would be singing on his ears, the blood tingling in his veins, his whole body would be a living arrow. Almost, already, in his imagination he could foretaste that joy — of seizing in his grasp, of clasp to his heart, the magic of things seen afar. To fling himself into the distance in one bound, to flash into the visionary scene before it had had time to transform itself — almost he knew how!

Now, however, leaning against the warm marble of the balustrade, he was staring before him dejectedly. And soon the voice of his nurse sounded in the room behind, calling him in to the terrors of a lonely night in a strange room in a vast and shadowy palace. Obeying, he went and stretched himself out upon his couch, and even closed his eyes. She asked if he had said his prayers, and then left him.

Alone, he gave a sigh. His life, alas! was much less simple than she or anyone else supposed. He was a Christian, yes; but those simple prayers to the simple Christian God did not satisfy him. There were other deities, less gentle. The most exacting he had discovered for himself. It had to be served with secret propitiatory rites. For instance, before going to sleep he had to touch with each of his five fingers each of the four walls of his room, and it was necessary to count up to five each time. This ceremony had to be repeated three times, nor could he allow his attention to stray for a single instant, otherwise sleep would be banished by the fear that he had made a slip. The business was so unpleasant that he always put it off as long as he could. A few minutes after his nurse had gone he got up and returned to the balcony.

There, what at once caught and fixed his attention was a kite balancing in strained immobility, immensely high in the blue. What was the kite thinking about? What held it, motionless and intent, in that particular place? Beneath was the palace with its

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courts and terraces, a maze of buildings encircled by the prodigious walls of the fort. In a wider circle lay the thronged and intricate city; and beyond the city stretched the plain — enormous, with the Jumna flowing across it, a shining red streak that passed from one veiled distance into another.

Was the kite solitary and speculative as he was, or did its affairs engross it as they engrossed ordinary men? Did the kite notice upon a certain balcony a small boy who was lamentably separate? No, of course to the kite he would not seem to be separate. The loneliness of being the only specimen of oneself was a part of one's own particular secret. Not even one's father or mother could guess it. But often it made him long to fling himself into his mother's arms with a cry: 'Let us fly together! Let us die together!' But fly wither? and die into what?

Fascinated by the kite he remained unaware that his father had come into the room. The Rajah stood in the glow that poured in through the balcony arch, a glow that was not the direct light of the sun, but a reflection from the flooding redness outside. It put a flush upon his white tunic and touched with a faint glitter his only ornaments, a jewelled sword-belt and the aigrette clasp on his turban.

Several minutes went by while Rajah Amar continued to gaze upon his son in meditation; what finally distracted him was the sound of steps in the corridor, and the next moment the curtains at the end of the room parted and the Ranee appeared. Standing still upon the threshold, she let her eyes wander about her. The long, narrow room was already dim; but the white marble of its walls distributed what light there was, making visible the delicate floral inlay of agate, onyx, and lapis lazuli, that ran up the doorway and spread across the vaulted ceiling. In this setting, in this dusk that had warmth and transparency, her loveliness was really extraordinary; the Rajah's smile, rapt, tender, and remote, rested upon her as if she were a figure in some pictured scene. The dress she wore was rose-coloured, with a fringe of silver, and a veil of pale lilac draped her head and shoulders. Tall and slender, she carried herself with an oriental grace, and yet she was not an Oriental. Her white skin, her dark brown hair that had a ripple in it, proclaimed a Caucasian descent. She was, in fact, the daughter of a Georgian prince, who, exiled, had found a refuge in Persia. There it was that the Rajah had met and married her. It had been the romance of

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his life and the wonder of it flashed over him now—now in these moments when by some vagary of imagination he found himself gazing at her detachedly with the eyes of a stranger.

At the first sound of her voice, Jali ran in from outside, and presently she took the boy back to his couch. He must be good, she said. He must go to sleep quickly, for he was tired; why, even they were tired after so many long days of travel.

On his bed, Jali lay listening to their lowered voices as they stood talking on the balcony. The sense of their words escaped him, but the sound fixed his mind upon the disquieting world of adult preoccupations. To begin with, this journey. His father was but one of hundreds of rajahs, chieftains, and grantees, who had been summoned by the Emperor to the Durbar. In this great palace he was actually the Emperor's guest. And this, to be sure, was but one among many palaces that Akbar was putting to use as guest-houses—for he himself was holding court at his new palace-city, Fatehpur-Sikri. The domed and towering outline of that city had been pointed out to him upon the horizon as they were approaching Agra. So many cities! So many palaces! So many noble princes summoned at a word! Grandeur realized upon this scale was inhuman. He had to imagine a world in which even his parents were dwarfed into insignificance. His heart contracted, shrinking before its vision of gigantic, heartless splendours.

After a while the Rajah and Ranee came in again, kissed him upon the forehead, and left him alone for the night. It seemed long ago since the thin, nasal call of the muezzins had floated through the air, but the creak of an occasional ox-cart still rose from the long, powdery roads below, and he could still hear the familiar croaking of the dusty crows preparing to roost. All at once he got up again and slipped out on to the balcony.

A cool breeze was brushing along the palace wall; he noticed it bending a small, wiry plant that grew out of a crack in the masonry below. On the southern or western wall that little plant would have had no chance (not even dry grey lichen could subsist on those scorched surfaces), but here, apparently, it just managed to draw life. Perhaps it was helped by a shallow gutter running along beneath it; perhaps some of its roots spread into the gutter and so could drink deeply whenever rain fell. But all the same, it must be a hard life, and the little plant looked dry enough—and stunted—and, above all, lonely. Jali was sorry for it in its loneliness; he felt

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the dull weight of the hours, weeks, and months of its solitude. There it would remain all its days, knowing naught else until it withered and was blown away.

With a sigh he looked farther afield, and his eyes widened as they fell upon something strange. Something was moving slowly and cautiously along the gutter — a snake! Yes, possibly even a cobra! The pale-yellow and brown of the snake's body glistened like a stream of flowing metal. By what mistake had the creature strayed into this unlikely place? Impossible to imagine! Yet there it was; and its slow movements betrayed uneasiness and confusion.

As he watched it his instinctive antipathy melted away. He could understand so well what the snake was feeling. He entered into its cold, narrow intelligence and shared its angry perplexity. Its movements were cramped, its advance difficult, it was in constant danger of slipping over the edge. Now and then it lay still in dull reflection, nursing a cold anger that could find no vent.

Meanwhile, the little plant, bent downwards by every puff of wind, was beating its thin twigs against the gutter like a birch. The snake seemed not to see the plant. It moved forward until a light touch from the twigs fell upon its head. At this it stopped and lifted its neck. The little plant was now doing no more than lightly sway and dip. The snake, its head still reared, flickered its tongue and waited. One could feel the angry heaving and straining in its sluggish brain — the dull, red anger waiting to explode. Then came a strong gust sweeping along the wall, and at once the twigs thrashed down upon that furious head — thrashed down and beat it with a movement that seemed to Jali both comic and dreadful. In a flash the head reared itself higher, the neck drew back, and there was a lunge at the twigs and the empty air. O fatal act! To strike, the snake had been obliged to coil, and its coiled body could not support itself upon the narrow ledge. No recovery was possible; it overbalanced and fell.

Jali leaned breathless over the balustrade and saw and heard the falling body strike upon a small, flat roof about fifty feet below. There the creature began to writhe in agony; it could do no more than twist and turn upon the self-same spot.

Jali was trembling, but beneath this agitation there was a deep, troubled wonder. Here was the little plant now waving with a kind of jaunty cynicism! And there was the writhing snake! He remained staring until the darkness was complete, and it was still in

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a dream that he felt his way back to bed. His chin upon his drawn-up knees, he stared into the obscurity. The world, unquestionably, was a place of mystery and terror. This was revealed in the writhing of the crippled snake, in the jaunty waving of the innocent plant in the wind, in the bright-eyed intentness of the hovering kite, in the terrible numerousness of living beings, both animal and human, all separate, all alone, all threatened by evil in ambush. The minutes slid past without his notice. He had forgotten everything, even his defensive rites. When next he stirred it was to become aware of night, deep night. He felt it in the quality of the silence — a silence which, when he listened, became alive with soundless activities. Spiritual presences moved. He was surrounded. Gradually he felt his skin tighten, his heart-beats quicken, his eyes dilate. Slipping to the floor, he crept crouching out of the room. Blessed was the moment when the curtain dropped behind him, and in a corner of the half-lit ante-chamber he perceived his old nurse, curled up asleep. Her serene unconsciousness reassured him; he would not disturb her. Besides, it was not her he wanted. But which was the way to his mother's room? He could not exactly remember.

A LONG, empty corridor, lit by small lamps of perfumed oil stretched away into the distance. Stealing down it on bare feet, he passed several doorways hung with silken curtains, and from behind them there came the murmur of women's voices. Excitement carried him on until he stood before an arch which seemed to lead out on to a small roof-terrace. Here he stopped to peep through the screen of woven khas-khas grass that stood across the entrance. The smell of the damped grass roots was delicious; and almost at once a low music of stringed instruments rose on the night air. A group of fine ladies were listening, but, as far as he could make out, his mother was not among them. This, however, was no great matter to him, for his fears were fast giving way to a sense of adventure. It was something new and strange to be thus wandering by night in a vast, unknown palace. He lingered until someone got up and moved towards the screen; whereupon, taking flight, he ran along several corridors and down stairway after stairway until he found himself in an ancient and seemingly unoccupied part of the building. It was solitary here; but, feeling like a ghost himself, he was not afraid. Going farther yet, and always in a downward direction, he noticed that the walls were no longer of marble but of old red sandstone. Their surface, polished by the touch of countless hands, the floor, too, worn by generations of passing feet, informed him that he was now in the substructure, the ancient palace over which the new one had been built. A further descent would carry him, he supposed, down into the living rock of the citadel; he would find himself at last in that underground labyrinth of which he had heard speak — a region that excited a curiosity which he dared not satisfy. Indeed, a shiver passed over him when all at once he heard, or rather felt, a deep vibration rising from the stone floor beneath his very feet. It took him a moment to realize that this was merely the trumpeting of elephants stabled in some cavern below. He had heard the same sound coming up from the rock chambers beneath his own palace at home. And now, as then, it brought before his mind the scene as he had occasionally witnessed it — the great grey hulks of the elephants, the glistening brown bodies of the men, a confusion of living forms which the smoky glare of the torches could only half illuminate.

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He imagined the pungent stable smell, sudden outbreaks of sound that flurried one out of one's senses, and the constant dread of being crushed to death.

Turning, he retraced his steps. He was walking faster now, and presently he began to walk faster still, for he had caught the sound of footfalls behind. Luckily the passage had so many turnings that he was able to keep out of sight of his follower. He refrained from running, but it was only from the fear lest those feet behind should break into a run too. Panic was threatening him when all at once he remembered that a little farther on there was a recess where he would be able to hide. Yes; here it was — with a massive pillar in front, which was very convenient. The paintings on the wall showed that this had once been a shrine to Ganpati. The god of luck! he reflected, as he crouched in the shadow cast by a small lamp hanging outside.

A few seconds later a figure appeared. It was that of a man of middle height, well-built and vigorous, who carried himself along with the swinging stride of the hill-folk. His outline seemed to Jali not unfamiliar, and then, to his astonishment, he realized that this was certainly no stranger. It was none other than his uncle, Hari Khan, the man who had married his father's sister. Hari was a borderland chieftain; he lived in the north among the mountains; a fine man, Jali had always thought, and friendly and amusing. To meet like this was really great fun. 'How about giving him a start!' he chuckled to himself; so out he leapt, all of a sudden, with a waving of his arms.

The effect of the joke was not what it should have been. He expected to see his uncle jump, but a cry of the friendliest surprise should have followed immediately after. Instead of this, Hari simply stopped dead and fixed him with an icy stare. True enough, that stare did not last long — hardly more than a second, in fact; but in that second Jali was disconcerted, and his uncle's exclamations, when they came, could not put matters right. Jali! By all the gods, Jali! Now how on earth did he come there! But the shock of that steely regard lingered and had the effect of reviving in his mind fragments of talk overheard on various occasions at home. He had gathered that his uncle was not altogether approved of, a discovery that heightened his interest, adding spice to his private opinion, that Hari Khan was a man whom one did well to like. Well, now — his thoughts ran — it was odd, very odd, to find Uncle Hari abroad in

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the women's quarters at this hour. And some reflection of his inward mystification no doubt appeared on his face; at any rate, Hari abruptly stopped questioning and began to smile at him speculatively.

'Supposing we sit down for a few minutes — here, on these steps. I should like to have a talk.'

They seated themselves, and still Jali could not keep his eyes from expressing the nature of his thoughts. His uncle was dressed, as he now observed, in riding costume; he looked dusty and hot; his expression was singularly alert.

'As for me, you know,' Hari explained carelessly, 'I've just arrived from up north. A hard day's ride I've had, my dear, and one of many. A few weeks ago I was hunting goat up in the hills . . . Yes, that's what I've been doing — all on my way down from Kabul. I come from the mountains, from the snows, and it's many a long mile, I can tell you.'

The sing-song voice and the smile made one uncertain whether to believe him. Hari's blue eyes, too, for all the apparent candour of their gaze, were extraordinarily unrevealing. Nevertheless Jali smiled too, and his heart responded to the comfortable feeling that his uncle's presence always gave him.

During the pause that now came, Hari's thoughts — to judge from that speculative look of his — were sweeping a wide range; and his talk, when he started again, certainly seemed rather rambling. But presently he broke off and began asking all sorts of questions; and then again he stopped to think. 'So that's how it is . . .' he was now musing aloud, 'you arrived two or three hours before sunset, and you found quite a crowd at the Great Gate. Narsing was there to receive you all; but I suppose . . .' and he hesitated, 'I suppose anyone really might have slipped in without being noticed? — Yes; and then you were taken up to your rooms. And outside your mother's room, you say there is a terrace — a small terrace overlooking the road by the river. . . . And you tried to fly your kite from that terrace, and one of your mother's serving-maids was with you. Let me see! Which one was it? Zaghul? She is young and pretty, isn't she? Yes, yes, of course I remember her! And do you know, as it happens, I was passing along that road this evening on my way into the town, and I think I caught sight of you and Zaghul leaning together over the terrace wall . . . What do you think of that?'



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'I never saw you,' replied Jali, wondering.

Hari looked away. He was still faintly smiling, and when he turned to Jali again his eyes shone with a secret amusement.

'You can't make me out!' said he.

Jali was silent.

Hari, laughing outright, leant forward and took him by the shoulder. To Jali it was abundantly clear by now that his uncle was alive to the necessity of accounting for himself. Moreover, the significance of his innumerable questions had become pretty plain. He was looking for something — anything — that upon necessity would help him to trump up an explanation of his doings. 'You can't make me out!' he had just said; and those words sounded like the prelude to a confession, a confidence, an appeal. Jali's heart bounded with excitement.

'My dear,' said Hari, 'why don't you ask me point blank what the devil I am up to?' Amusement and good-humour were twinkling together in his eyes. 'You think I should answer with some lie. Alas! if only I could find a good one!'

'Well, well!' he went on a moment later, 'it is true enough that I have no business here. But this is also true: my only object is to get through into another part of the building without anyone challenging me. I want to get to the Great Terrace, where I shall mingle very respectably with the Emperor's other guests. I also want to see Gokal — you remember Gokal? — I think he is probably there.'

Jali, already an accomplice, thrilled. 'Do you think I can help you? In any case — I suppose you don't want me to speak of this meeting?'

Hari knit his brows. 'I won't ask you to lie, although, to be sure, a lie is easily atoned for by a little offering to Saraswati.'

'You forget,' said Jali, 'I am a Christian.'

'No, I don't forget.'

At this Jali blushed. He was a Christian, certainly, for his mother had brought him up in her faith; but — good heavens! was there any religion in the world of which he was not, more or less, an adherent? If his mother was a Christian, was not his father a Buddhist, his old nurse a Jain, his teacher a Brahmin, and the companions of his play-hours either Moslems or adherents of some variety of Hinduism? The truth was that Jali was ready to acknowledge every known god as well as others of his own imagining.

'After all, you are your father's son,' continued Hari, 'and your

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father's people have lived in this country for many generations. Men cannot live in this country without becoming what the country wills.'

Jali was troubled. 'Will my mother, then, change?'

'Your mother is an angel,' smiled Hari. 'God forbid that she should change.'

'I don't mind telling lies for you,' said Jali, 'I tell lies for myself.'

Hari shook his head. 'I don't want you to lie. And even to keep secrets is a burden. But if it costs you nothing to be silent, then be silent.'

'I can easily say nothing,' said Jali, after a pause. 'You see, I have secrets all the time.'

His eyes resting upon the boy meditatively, Hari leant back against the wall. Tranquillity had returned to him; indeed, there was nothing in his manner to suggest that the night was not all before them.

'You have not yet told me why you got up to look for your mother. You felt lonely, I suppose?'

Jali admitted it, and a little later, since Hari was the most understanding of all the grown-up people that he knew, he was telling the story of the small plant and the snake. Hari listened with an attention that was not forced; if he failed to grasp the exact nature of the impression made upon Jali's mind, he did not seem puzzled by the fact that an impression had been made. He pondered; he speculated. 'There is too much chance in the world,' he said, 'and yet, you know, chance is what makes life interesting.'

Jali was silent.

'I think life frightens you?' said Hari, smiling.

Jali coloured and still remained silent.

'Not to be afraid of this world,' said Hari slowly, 'you must belong to it.'

'Ah, but how?' thought Jali.

'One can always pretend to oneself that one does,' Hari went on, looking at him intently. 'Didn't I tell you once that in a nightmare the way to escape a pursuing tiger is to turn oneself into one?'

'Yes.'

'Pretend to yourself that you are like others,' said Hari carelessly. 'Everyone is doing it.'

'But if everyone is pretending to be like others, who is like himself?'

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Hari laughed.

'There is less evil in the world than you think,' said he. 'At least, that is the best line to go on.'

Jali made no reply. What his uncle said was wise and reassuring as far as it went; but what about the evil in the gods? The universe was full of terrifying and destructive forces. There was Kali. . . .

They sat in silence for a time, and in this pause Jali again thrilled to the mystery that enveloped him. To be here, in these soundless vaults, in the depth of night, they two, alone! He pressed his feverish hands against the stone of the step. His gaze rested upon Hari with a dark intensity. That man gave him courage. *His* life, he felt sure, was one long adventure. Well! he, too, would live adventurously. It was a resolve, a sacred vow.

Hari seemed to have gone off into a reverie again, but all at once he gave another little laugh, tapped his companion on the shoulder, and got up. It was time to part, he said. Was Jali ready to go back to bed? Good! A sound sleep, this time, and pleasant dreams!

He stood smiling under the lamp while Jali walked firmly away. The boy's mind was at rest in a sort of exaltation. He found his way back to his room as by a miracle and once in bed fell asleep instantly.

SITA was the name the Rajah had given his wife after their marriage; but she had been christened Helen, and as they stood together on Jali's balcony in the fading light, he mused upon the problem of identity, thinking how, under that name, in her own country, amongst her own people, she would have been — would she not? — someone else. Individuality, identity, selfhood, these words, as Buddha said, stood for what was little more than illusion. People were like clouds — changing, melting, mixing . . . But was it right to have married her, to have brought her here? Did it appear right now in the light of the decision that he was taking?

Ten years her senior, he felt himself old enough to be her father. If she had the gift of innocence, he had a faculty for experience; and some men, he reflected, are born with the experience of their ancestors already resting somewhat heavily upon them. He could not reproach her, if, after all these years, in spite of their love, they were still, spiritually, wide apart. In his religion, as he well knew, he stood aloof, not only from her but from nearly all his contemporaries. Buddhism had all but died out of India, and where it survived its form was debased. Many years of study and meditation had at last brought the Rajah to the belief that he had grasped — and even in a certain sense rediscovered — the doctrine of Buddha in its authentic purity. Whole-hearted in his rejection of God, the Soul, and Immortality, he had a profound contempt for all corruptions of the original teaching. He condemned the Mahayana as a whole; in his opinion, by shifting the emphasis from self-discipline to altruism, it had entirely falsified Gautama's word. Such a concession to human sentiment was disastrous; the truth, in order to be the truth, must be accepted in its entirety. No man could help his fellow save by the force of his example, save by the spectacle of his achieved holiness. The reward of holiness was the bliss of peace — a bliss that you received in this life, and afterwards — well, afterwards your peace was the peace that passeth all understanding. Such had been the teaching of the Enlightened One; it was the truth; and for those who properly understood it, it was the happy truth.

Sita had never been able to understand it. But, although this was a disappointment to him, he did not — no, he did not reproach her.

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After all, she was blessed. As she walked through the world she found beauty there, and that beauty was to her an assurance that life did, indeed, have the meaning she ascribed to it. Wonderful in her, thought Amar, was the constancy of this accompaniment through all the trivialities of daily living. This it was that kept her gaiety so fresh. Not many minutes ago he had been deterred from entering her room by a babble of feminine talk and laughter, and now she was telling him how amusing the gathering had been. Yes, she had always been popular; she knew how to enjoy the fun of the moment; she and those other ladies were still able to laugh at jokes that had been exchanged for the first time when, as a bride of eighteen, she had arrived in India.

Presently, as they were leaving Jali's room, she besought him to accompany her back to her own apartments. There were some letters to show him, she said; besides, as he well knew, it amused her to overcome his shyness. To his great relief they made their way along the interminable passages without encountering anyone, but, just as he was settling down, the curtains were flung aside and a pretty young woman swept in. Courtly and confused, he at once jumped to his feet. 'It is only my husband!' cried Sita, 'don't run away, my dove!' But the girl, with a light laugh and lowered eyes, fell back and withdrew. Amar looked into his wife's smiling face and knitted his brows reprovingly. She certainly did not know what he knew; that Ranee Jagashri's husband was the most watchfully jealous man in India — and with good reason.

His thoughts taking a new turn, he looked into his heart and pondered. No; thank God, he could find no jealousy there! Many were the seekers after deliverance, who, when they had reached the age to sever worldly and domestic ties, still hung back. Were he jealous, how could he ever leave this wife of his, so young still and so beautiful, to finish her life without him? In thirteen years she had scarcely changed at all. Her face and figure, like her character, had retained a girlish freshness.

With a sigh he looked again at the two letters he had picked out from the rest. The first was from Queen Miriam, Akbar's Christian consort. She invited Sita to attend service in the little chapel that the Emperor had built for her at Fatehpur-Sikri. Sita would certainly wish to go — and to take Jali with her. But Jali ought not to go; there were political reasons that were obvious; unfortunately, however, Sita would ignore them completely.

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The other letter was an invitation from his sister, Ambissa, offering her the coveted distinction of a room in the palace at Fatehpur-Sikri. Of course she ought to accept; but — how bitterly she would cry out against it! The fact was — and the Rajah sighed heavily — she carried unworldliness too far. Life for her remained too simple; she knew but to follow her heart. Not that her head was weak, but it was subject. And while her instinctive charge against him was over-subtlety in the interests of a set philosophic scheme, his against her was that she yielded too easily to the sweeping simplifications of the heart. In vain he reminded her that the children of light were called upon to be as wise as the children of this world; in vain he quoted: 'Render unto Caesar . . .'; she would not change her views or her ways.

When he looked up it was to find her eyes fixed questioningly upon him. She was leaning one shoulder against the wall; her head drooped, and he could see that an anticipatory flush of protest had mounted to her cheeks.

He smiled. This pause was charged with memories of long-standing disagreements, nothing ugly, nothing wounding, although sometimes exasperating to both. He could hear her saying: 'I believe, I really believe, that in your heart you sometimes wish I were worldly and sophisticated! But even if I tried, it would be no good. And I don't intend to try, for it seems to me that the worldly life is without depth, without richness, without colour. People who enjoy competing and making a show very soon get to think that nothing else matters.' And, to this, his reply, he could also hear that: his patient, his reasonable, his so-often-repeated reply.

In this moment his mind was made up. Nevertheless, just to try her, he pointed to the two letters and said: 'Well?'

'Oh,' she murmured, 'you know, without my saying it, what I want. You know, too, what I should simply hate!' and she sighed.

'Yes. I know.'

'And what do you say?'

'I say: Do as you like.'

For several moments after hearing this she looked a little puzzled, a little mistrustful, but gradually a glowing smile of reassurance spread over her face. Her gratitude was altogether delightful, and for the next half-hour, while she was laughing, chatting, and putting order among her things, the Rajah, watching her, had a mind freed from care.

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At this point Amar groaned with impatience and looked to see how many more pages there were. Not many, and they could be skimmed, but his attention was held by the postscript.

'I have just this moment discovered that Hari's invitation to the palace at Agra has been cancelled. So now you see that I was not exaggerating! For pity's sake ask Gokal what he thinks. I simply cannot imagine what my position will be if Hari fails to appear at the Durbar. Please, Amar, come and see me to-morrow without fail, and make it as early as possible.'

The Rajah gave a little laugh of vexation. His own affairs were likely to give him trouble enough, and Ambissa was always immoderate in her demands. To begin with, she had made him late for Gokal.

HUGE, dim lanterns stood at the four corners of the terrace, spreading pools of light upon the marble flags beneath them; the rest of the great expanse lay cold and white under the stars. Amar's eyes wandered over the Emperor's guests, who were scattered in small groups here and there. It took him a few moments to distinguish Gokal. His friend's bulky form, draped in white Brahminical robes, would have caught his eye quickly enough had it not been partially hidden by the figure of the man in conversation with him. Who this was, the Rajah failed to make out until he had come quite near, and then, to his extreme surprise, he saw that it was actually his errant brother-in-law. Well! Ambissa, no doubt, would be vastly relieved, but this apparition was certainly no pleasure to him, not just now. It shattered his hopes for an evening of philosophy.

And, as if this were not enough, a drop of pure annoyance was added to his disappointment. His coming — he saw it quite distinctly — was of the nature of an interruption. Hari had been talking and Gokal listening, each with great absorption; and this was hurriedly dissimulated the moment their eyes fell upon him. It was an old puzzle what these two, in character, tastes, and habits, so unlike, found in one another. There the intimacy was, however; and he had just seen it illustrated in their eager confabulation. Not a question but that Hari had been letting Gokal into some exciting secret. Well, Hari's secrets were of no interest whatsoever to *him*; only — and here he gave an inward sigh — he mustn't forget his duty to Ambissa.

Anxious not to give any clue even to the smallest of his feelings, he greeted Hari with more cordiality than was absolutely necessary, and a kindred instinct kept him from asking even the most natural questions. After all, it was for Hari to speak out of his own accord. Let him declare in so many words where he had been hiding during the last two months; whence he sprang; how (since he was not invited) he came to be in the palace at all; in short, let him account for himself. Why, even his dress called for explanation; that tunic of his was very old and scandalously dusty; his turban was torn and his riding boots had obviously not been polished for several days.



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In spite of Amar's outward geniality the first greetings were hardly over before a silence threatened to descend. To prevent it the Rajah, eyeing Gokal affectionately, inquired with exaggerated solicitude after the state of his health. This big, sedentary pundit had a talent for humorously exploiting his own foibles, one of which was nervousness about the smallest bodily ailment. Quick to take his cue, Gokal replied with deep gravity that his appetite was not very good and that he feared the position of his present abode was not completely salubrious. He was occupying a little pavilion in the Royal Hunting Grounds, which had been put at his disposal by the Emperor. For this reason it was quite impossible for him to leave it, and thus, as Amar could see, he was placed in a very serious quandary.

While Gokal was talking Hari had looked distraught: and now, turning to Amar with a certain abruptness: 'I hear', said he, 'that you are going up to the Hills this year.'

Amar assented, and he was wondering from whom Hari could possibly have got the news, when the latter went on: 'Sita was telling me just now how much she is looking forward to the change. I fancy she sometimes misses her Caucasus.'

This time the Rajah was positively taken aback. 'Sita told you just now! What do you mean?'

Hari laughed carelessly. 'I have just been paying her a little visit.' Surprise kept the Rajah silent.

'Was that too unconventional?' inquired Hari, raising his eyebrows.

The Rajah gave a short laugh. 'Of course not; although she must have been rather startled. For one thing, your clothes. . . . They made me suppose that you had only just got down from your horse.'

To this Hari said nothing, and in the pause that followed the Rajah did some rapid thinking. Hari, in his difficulties, must have conceived the notion of enlisting Sita's sympathies, and thought to steal a march by this strangely timed visit. 'But I won't have it!' he mentally exclaimed. 'I won't have him impose on her warm-heartedness.'

Annoyed, he turned away and let his glance wander about him. What a pity that trivial preoccupations were spoiling the serenity of this hour. The terrace, tinted gold by the lanterns, was itself like a great lantern suspended high in the deep blue air of the night. From gardens far below there rose a dampness scented with orange-

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blossom. Fireflies were darting their greenish lights about the lower levels of the darkness, and overhead there was the sharp brilliance of the stars.

Amar had withdrawn so deeply into himself that at a touch upon his shoulder he started. It was Gokal; Gokal was pointing to a glow upon the western horizon, and in a low voice he said: 'Fatehpur-Sikri!'

The three men walked across to the balustrade, and as they did so a soft plume of light spread out in the distant dark. Others followed; arrows, fountains, and showers, of coloured light bejewelled that far-off patch of sky.

The memory of his first visit to the palace-city was revived in Amar's mind. That had been ten years ago, just after the completion of the principal buildings, and a few months before Akbar transferred himself there with his court. He remembered smiling as he stood surveying those walls of fresh-cut stone, uncertain whether he was contemptuous of Akbar or of himself — of Akbar for his confidence or of himself for his doubts. Did the Emperor never question whether the future would justify him? That splendid, unnecessary 'City of Victory' raised upon a waterless waste, did he never conceive a later generation moralizing over its ruins? Well! Ten years had gone by since then, and that display on the horizon was Akbar's present answer.

In the meantime, Hari and Gokal had begun to talk about the coming Durbār. The topic was inevitable, although not altogether an agreeable one. There were few among the tributary princes who did not shrink from making a formal exhibition of their vassalage. If, in the ensuing conversation, the Rajah preserved an air of greater indifference than Hari, it was not because his feelings went less deep. The border chieftains were accustomed to the arbitrament of arms; the conqueror in the field was your over-lord by the Will of God. But the Rajah's case was different; his father before him had decided not to throw away human lives in a hopeless struggle; his Principality had lost its independence, but retained an honourable place in the Empire, due to the esteem which the ruling house commanded. It was because he stood aloof from war that the Rajah was minded to regard Akbar as superciliously as the haughtiest of the militant Rajputs. His pride was rooted in ideas of racial, cultural, and intellectual superiority. Akbar might be a great conqueror, but what of that? He might trace his descent from both Tamerlane and

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Jenghiz Khan, but who were they? Barbarians without tradition, culture, or understanding.

In order to change the subject he at last turned to Gokal. 'I understand that the banquet to-night is in honour of the Ambassadors from the East. You, an oriental scholar, how comes it that you are not in attendance?'

'I begged to be excused on account of my health. His Majesty knows that after a State banquet I lie sleepless all night.' And Gokal sighed and smiled simultaneously.

'I have reason to believe,' said Hari with abruptness, 'that Akbar loves me no longer.' He threw a glance at his brother-in-law. 'I wonder if anyone can tell me the reason?'

'Not I,' returned Amar, laconically.

'Well, I expect it's all Ambissa's fault,' Hari grumbled this out with a kind of jocular bad taste. 'However, I shall certainly not stay in Agra for long unless I find that I am properly appreciated. Now if you were in my place . . .' He had been keeping an eye fixed upon one of the palace servants who was trimming the lantern in the corner; and, after breaking off, he suddenly called out to the man.

'I think,' he said slowly, 'I think you have been instructed to spy upon me.'

'No, indeed, my lord!' came the humble answer.

Hari compressed his lips. 'Present my compliments to the Palace Chamberlain and say I should be glad to have a word with him.'

As soon as the man had gone, the Rajah, who had been looking upon this scene with a puzzled frown, shrugged his shoulders and said: 'You lose no time in making yourself unpopular.'

Hari all at once seemed to recover his good-humour. 'Why should I be persecuted by eavesdroppers?' And his eyes twinkled.

'You are talking nonsense,' retorted the Rajah crossly. 'Even if that fellow was eavesdropping, what of it? You know as well as I do that spies are everywhere. It is part of the established order.'

'You may be accustomed to that sort of thing, but I am not,' replied Hari, still with a grin.

Amar sighed, leant back against the balustrade, and assumed an air of ironical detachment. 'By the way,' he brought out, 'you should have asked, not for the Palace Chamberlain, but for the Commandant.'

'Narsing is the man I want.'

'That is the Commandant. The Chamberlain . . .'

He had no time to say more, for a small, dapper figure was already to be seen advancing towards them. Mabun Das was one of those nobodies who attained to positions of power in Akbar's Court. A hint of the subtleness and adroitness that had raised him from obscurity was given in the quick movements of his intelligent eyes and the flutter of his thin, nervous hands. With an elaborate gesture of salutation he stepped before Hari and let flow an elegant apology for failing to meet the distinguished guest at the Gate.

Hari's return of compliments was equally polite; and he added expressions of deep regret at his inability to accept the honour which His Imperial Majesty had done him in inviting him to lodge at the palace. To this the Chamberlain replied with chagrin, but not with much surprise. So far, so good, thought the Rajah; Hari seemed to be mixing a kind of tact with his tomfoolery. Very prudent was his extreme politeness towards this little, dark-skinned southerner, who had the advantage of him, although very much his inferior in rank. Not a word was spoken on the subject of the supposed eavesdropper.

'Having presented my excuses to you,' Hari went on, 'I have but one other desire before taking my leave; I wish to pay my respects to His Majesty's Deputy himself.'

The Bengalee's bright eyes flickered for a moment, then — 'Of course!' he cried, with an air of happy alacrity, 'I will go and acquaint Narsing Khan of your arrival at once.'

As soon as his back was turned, Hari threw a speaking glance at his brother-in-law.

'You have not saved your dignity yet,' commented the Rajah. 'That little scribe will most likely send word that Narsing is asleep or engaged. Why on earth you came here at all I cannot imagine.'

At this Hari's face darkened, but the cloud passed quickly. Hardly had the Rajah finished speaking before the silence of the now empty terrace was broken by the stir of an approaching company. Half a dozen link-boys came forward with lights, and behind them advanced someone whose importance was thus properly illuminated. Here, by a stroke of luck, was Narsing in all his glory. Nor was the big, burly Turcoman difficult to recognize, in spite of his having shaved off his beard and taken on, in place of his usual shabby hunting-suit, a glittering costume to match his recent appointment. It was before this impressive figure that Hari now planted himself, legs apart and head thrown back, with an air that was almost truculent.

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'By Allah, the All-powerful!' the great man cried out, 'how do you come to be here?'

Hari grinned. 'And you, old elephant, why were you not at the Great Gate to receive me?'

For a moment Narsing looked as if he might take this amiss, but his good-humour prevailed. Pushing his jewelled turban aside, he scratched his head in perplexity, 'I told Mabun Das that, if you came, you were to be brought straight to my private room. The truth is — I have a matter of some delicacy to explain.'

Hari continued to look up into Narsing's large red face with amusement, and Narsing stopped scratching his head to pull at a recently vanished beard.

'Proceed without embarrassment,' said Hari; 'I swear by your beard that I am not a man to take offence.'

'Good, good!' returned Narsing, with a certain relief. 'Well, in a word, the trouble is this: His Imperial Majesty is seriously displeased with you.' The announcement was accompanied by a look in which inquiry and commiseration were evenly balanced.

'Then my invitation to this palace is cancelled?'

'I am afraid it is.'

Hari smiled. 'I thought as much. But what is the reason?'

'There is no reason given.'

'But a reason must exist.'

'Well, my dear fellow,' and Narsing gave a good-natured guffaw, 'the reason — whatever it may be — is probably better known to you than to anyone else.'

With the air of having said something rather smart, he turned to Amar. 'Eh, what do you say, Rajah?'

Hari put on an expression of patient resignation. 'Some story of a woman, I suppose. Really, poor old Akbar has women on the brain. And no wonder,' he added, 'considering that the Royal Palace contains some five thousand of them.'

'Hush!' cried Narsing, genuinely shocked by this freedom of speech; and the Rajah, tapping Hari on the shoulder, drew his attention to the approach of Mabun.

Narsing assumed a haughty expression, which did not sit easily upon his genial features. 'Mabun Das,' said he, 'why did you not inform me of Hari Khan's arrival?'

The Chamberlain threw out his hands in a gesture of helpless protestation. Narsing, he explained, had set himself an impossible

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task in attempting to welcome each guest individually and conduct him to his apartments. Many had arrived at the same moment, and, as chance would have it, Hari Khan had passed through unwelcomed by anyone — not even by his humble self. 'For this unintentional rudeness I have already offered Hari Khan my whole-hearted apologies,' he added, turning to Hari with a charming smile.

A look of gloomy perplexity appeared upon Narsing's honest face. His responsibilities weighed heavily upon him. He knew that he was but a child compared to Mabun, whose mastery of the intricacies of etiquette was only equalled by his grasp of court intrigues. He was well enough acquainted with Mabun's ways to guess that his Chamberlain wished him to hold his tongue. When they were next alone together some obscure factor in the situation would be tactfully revealed to him. But class loyalty, as well as an old-established liking for Hari, caused him to turn to the latter with a questioning air. His eyes said: 'I would infinitely prefer to discuss your affairs with you rather than with him.'

There was a slight pause, and then: 'The apologies have come from the wrong side,' said Hari with deliberation. 'My entry into the palace, my dear Narsing, was, I am afraid, very unconventional. I got in —' and he gave a shrug and a laugh, 'I got in by a certain secret way.'

'By all the devils of Eblis!' exclaimed Narsing, prodigiously taken aback. He stared, then turned in partial illumination to his Chamberlain. 'And you had guessed this, I suppose?'

Mabun threw up his hands as one who is casting discretion to the winds. 'What shall I say?' he laughed. 'Perhaps I had my suspicions! But Hari Khan is Hari Khan. And after all . . .'

Hari continued to address himself to Narsing. 'There is a secret way. . . . And, although it takes one through the women's quarters, I was indiscreet enough to try it.'

'Oh, Hari Khan!' Mabun Das cried out with archness, 'in the old days what a scandal such a confession would have made!'

Narsing, who was still staring, pulled at his absent beard.

'I don't like it,' he muttered. 'I don't like it.'

'I saw no harm,' replied Hari carelessly. 'I was curious to see whether that passage was open, whether an entry was possible for an uninvited guest.'

'Humph!' grunted Narsing.

For a few moments no one spoke; Narsing's glance swept round the empty spaces of the terrace and his face was heavy with delibera-

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tion. At last he clapped his hands and shouted for cushions. He found it difficult to think clearly while his feet were supporting a weight of sixteen stone.

'Look here, my friend,' he said at last. 'This is only a trifle, but we must get it cleared up at once. You are not in a position to play pranks of any kind. His Majesty, you know. . . . Besides, some of our guests here might well be scandalized. . . . In short, may Satan take you! I must get to the bottom of this affair.'

Thus speaking, he moved to a corner of the terrace where carpets and cushions had been spread upon the flags.

'Bring wine!' he called out to an attendant; 'and let it be well packed in snow. My official duties are over for to-night. I shall now hold an unofficial court of inquiry.'

Inviting Gokal to be seated on his right and Amar on his left, he sank down upon the softest of the cushions. His return to serenity was being greatly assisted by the thought that the impeccable Mabun had been caught napping at last.

'Now, Hari Khan,' he began, after the wine jug had gone round, 'I must ask you to make a full confession. In the first place, where is this secret way?'

'You enter it from the old, disused elephant stables.'

Mabun nodded. 'I know. But I had ordered that a guard should be placed there. It is extraordinary!'

Narsing gave him an impressive glare, and then turned again to Hari.

'How long is it since you broke into the palace?'

'Oh, about a couple of hours, I suppose.'

Narsing held up a fat finger. 'Not more?'

'Well, make it a little more. But for the last hour at least I have been talking to Gokal on this terrace.'

Narsing became still more magisterial. 'And before that?'

'I paid a visit to my sister-in-law, Ranee Sita.'

Narsing glanced to his left, but Amar's face showed nothing.

'But—but it was an odd time for a visit. When did you arrive in Agra?'

'This evening. At sundown.'

'At sundown! And I see the dust of your journey still on you. Am I not right in supposing that you made your way straight into the palace?'

Hari was silent.

'Well, now!' continued Narsing, delighting in his own perspicacity. 'It remains for us to find out just why you were in such a hurry to get in.'

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From this moment, warming to his task, he bombarded the culprit with questions. In a few minutes he elicited the statement that Hari had caught sight of little Jali from the road below. And then came his masterstroke, the illumination towards which he had been struggling; he extorted from the reluctant Hari the admission that Jali had not been alone, that with him had been a maid — a young and pretty serving-maid — whom Hari had perhaps seen once or twice before. When this came out he made a noticeable pause, swept a glance round the assembly, and gave a wink so large and inclusive that everyone present had a share in it. Hari's impulse to enter the palace, his visit to Sita Ranee, the hour or so that could not be accounted for — all was explained. It was a triumph for the cross-examiner, and after Hari had sworn upon his honour that his sister-in-law's apartments were the only ones that he had visited, the good man declared himself satisfied, and the inquiry closed.

This, however, did not mean that he had finished talking. Hari had to receive a reprimand; the Rajah was told that he should advise his wife to be more watchful of the chickens in her charge; and as for Mabun Das — here his tone grew more magisterial — well! he hoped that Mabun Das was as much dismayed as he was to discover that the palace was insecure. Yes, insecure! An opening for scandal and even for crime had been revealed. Was not he, Narsing, answerable for the safety and honour of the highest-born and prettiest women in the Empire to the number of about four score? And what about their jewels? And what about the Emperor's treasure, well known to be lying in the palace vaults?

Colour had risen to his cheeks from the heat of his own eloquence; but the snow-cooled wine and the freshness of the midnight hour spread a peace to which he had to yield. Allah, what a night it was! And how good it was, too, to take one's leisure after a toilsome day! Spreading himself out like a fowl of brilliant plumage, he cast his heavy turban aside and gazed up into the sky. These blessed hours of cool and quiet — he was addressing himself to Gokal — were they not intended by the Deity for love, for wine, for conversation with congenial friends and, of course, for religious meditation? To this Gokal gave murmurs of discreet assent. And then Narsing sighed. His kind heart was afflicted by the recollection that the Brahmin could not take wine. That wine was also forbidden to the Faithful was a thought that did not enter his head.



WHILE these matters were going forward Amar had preserved a detached and faintly ironic air. Nor was this indifference altogether feigned; it was certainly not in order to investigate his brother-in-law's intrigues that he had made the journey to Agra. And yet there was something in this affair that did tease his curiosity. Although he felt almost sure that Narsing was in some way being fooled, he could not believe that any of Hari's downright assertions were false. The puzzle, then, was to conceive what motive he could actually have had for this slinking entry into the palace, and what he could have been doing all the time besides paying that unaccountable visit to Sita. The story of an amour with a serving-maid did not provide a very convincing explanation. There might be something in it, but it seemed too trivial to account for the various peculiar features of Hari's behaviour. But never mind; enough, and more than enough! The wretched business had already received far more attention than it deserved.

Time for the Rajah passed rapidly in solitude, but slowly in the company of such men as Narsing. Narsing, although beaming with animal vitality, affected him as spiritually non-existent. Nevertheless, as he now told himself, these solid, bustling bodies had their place in the world, nor must he forget that it was his business whilst at Agra to be attentive to the thoughts of others rather than his own.

Narsing's discourse had now turned upon the Emperor, a subject upon which he was well qualified to speak. Springing like Akbar from Central Asian stock, bred in the same customs and traditions, a faithful follower for thirty years in the field as well as at Court, he had known the man in every phase of his career. His eyes had witnessed the building up of the Empire that now stretched over the whole of Northern India, from the frontiers of Persia to the Burmese jungle. The soldier, the administrator, the statesman, the despot, he knew them all. Nor had ample opportunity been wanting, in this stretch of years, to study Akbar's inner life. Only here Narsing had been frustrated by his own temperament. The deep racial and religious drives that carried Akbar along, now hurling him into blunder, now sweeping him on an even wave to success, these forces

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Narsing was not content simply to find incomprehensible; he had to puzzle and fret over them. More especially he was baffled by the Emperor's attitude towards his sons, and by his unending pre-occupation with religion. This last was surely a very dangerous tendency. Yes, obviously in these two provinces of human life Akbar was a bungler; he had never learnt how to deal with his children or with God. To take his sons first: the eldest, Prince Salim, was now openly preparing to usurp the throne; Prince Murad had just died of drink; and as for the youngest, Daniyal — well, what his father thought of him no one could tell, but he, Narsing, preferred even that rascal, Salim. Then turn to religion; Akbar had been born a good Moslem, but his friends had seen him first questioning, then rejecting, and finally oppressing the Faith. Not for one single day of his life had he known spiritual tranquillity. At Fatehpur-Sikri a special Hall had been built for religious debate, and here he would collect Sufis, Sunnis, Shias, Brahmins, Jains, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and crack-brained exponents of every variety of fantastic belief. And then he would make them talk. By Allah! how they talked! And what had come of it all? Nothing! Nothing, unless one was to refer to those clamorous and yet dreary sittings the puny thing that Akbar had recently thrust forth upon the world — a new religion, forsooth — the Din Ilahi, a miscreation that would be negligible were it not so powerfully fathered. The Din Ilahi was by way of containing the valuable constituents of all pre-existing faiths, and its practical purpose was nothing less than to unify the Empire and purify it. What could one say?

Such was the situation over which Narsing was now expending himself in voluble lamentation. He did not need to tell his hearers that the horizon was clouded, but he doubted whether, in the midst of so much splendour and apparent prosperity, they would realize just how threatening the outlook was. Had they heard that the Emperor was on the point of giving his new religion a formal promulgation? Did they realize the extent to which this absurd act would invigorate all the disruptive elements in the Empire? In every province, he told them, the more fanatical of the Moslems were already secretly promising Prince Salim their support, and the rest of the population was preparing to rally under Prince Daniyal. 'As for accepting the Din Ilahi,' and he flung out a hand at Gokal, 'is there, I ask you, a single man of self-respect who will condescend to it?'

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Dejectedly the Brahmin shook his head.

'Ah, my dear friend!' sighed Narsing, 'you, who have the ear of the Emperor, why cannot you restrain him, dissuade him?'

Gokal said nothing, and his silence convicted Narsing of a want of tact. As a universally respected leader of religious thought, Gokal had grave responsibilities; and these, as anyone might see, threatened to clash with his private interests. For years he had been a special protégé of Akbar's; appointed Court Librarian, he enjoyed a privileged position by the Imperial throne.

Making haste to change his tone and topic, Narsing launched forth into a tirade against Salim. 'By Allah!' he cried, 'when I think of that man's insolences my blood boils. Can you conceive it, he has actually set up a mint at Allahabad and strikes coins in his own image! Yes, and the other day, if you please, he sent a complete set of his coins to his royal father "to add to his numismatic collection".' On the subject of the prince it was not difficult to be entertaining. Salim's character was so freakishly compounded that everything he said or did had its ridiculous side. Sensual, unprincipled and ill-educated, he, none the less, was a man of aspiration. For love he entertained a respect which made him sentimental, for religion a regard which threw him into the grossest superstitions, and for learning a craving that immersed him in alchemy and pseudo-scientific research. Narsing described how he had come upon him one day engrossed in an experiment to extract a special kind of copper from peacocks' feathers. And then, to be sure, there were his literary pretensions! His memoirs! From those stray leaves, carelessly left behind on his removal to Allahabad, court gossips had derived much amusement. For instance, there was the famous description of Akbar: 'In his august personal appearance my father is of middle height, but inclining to be tall; he is of the hue of wheat; his eyes and eyebrows are black, and his complexion rather dark than fair; he is lion-bodied, with a broad chest, and his hands and arms long. On the left side of his nose he has a fleshy mole, very agreeable in appearance, of the size of half a pea. Those skilled in the science of physiognomy consider this mole a sign of great prosperity and exceeding good fortune. His august voice is very loud, and in speaking and explaining has a peculiar richness. In his actions and movements he is not like the people of the world, and the Glory of God manifests itself in him.'

'As I hope for Paradise!' exclaimed Narsing at the end of his

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quotation, 'what that rogue says there is true! Akbar is more than human!'

His glowing face and glistening eyes were an invitation to his audience to indulge a like enthusiasm, but none of the others had drunk so much wine, and none, certainly, gave the Emperor so unstinting a devotion. Undeterred by their silence, Narsing pursued his theme.

'Gentlemen! had you seen what I have so often seen, the tears would be no further from your eyes than they are from mine now. There, upon his seat on the terrace at Fatehpur-Sikri, night after night, alone, the Emperor sits. Like an image in stone he looks out into the darkness covering this great Empire — the Empire which the strength of his arm and the toil of his brain have built up. And mine, gentlemen, mine has not seldom been the honour of waiting upon him there. I advance across the terrace bearing his jug of wine — the opium wine with which he strives to drown his sorrow. Sometimes the night is dark and I can see no more than his outline. But sometimes the moon is high and clear, and then what do I see? A face of grief! A face of bitter grief!'

Without a doubt the good man was speaking from a heart which, if sentimental, was sincere; none the less this ebullition was felt by all to be rather embarrassing; his audience were not sorry when they caught sight of Mabun drawing near.

'Well!' demanded Narsing, his forehead wrinkling with vexation. 'What now?'

Mabun sighed sympathetically. 'Prince Daniyal! He asks to see you. He is waiting below.'

Narsing stared, then emitted a weary groan. 'At this hour! Merciful Allah! What does His Royal Highness want?'

'I am not sure,' answered Mabun with caution. 'But he said something about the hairless cat that you promised to procure for him.'

'The hairless cat! You hear that?' He glared round at his circle. 'The hairless cat! May he and his menagerie of disgusting pets — But enough! Where is my turban?'

Scrambling to his feet, he began to hunt, with many curses, among the cushions. While he was kicking about, Gokal found it for him.

'I thank you, my honoured friend. You see what my life has become. No peace at any hour! Well, my friends, well . . . I wish

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you all good night. Rajah, do me the favour of seeing Hari Khan off the premises before you go to bed. Go in peace, Hari Khan; may you enjoy tranquil slumbers elsewhere!' With these words he strode off accompanied by Mabun, leaving his guests to smile after his retreating figure.

When talk was resumed it fell again upon the subject of Akbar, but now, left to themselves, the three friends felt at liberty to treat of the Emperor rather differently.

'I believe,' said Gokal, when pressed to speak, 'I believe that the Emperor's inner life will always remain a mystery. His youth, as we all know, was wild and reckless; he drank to excess and wantonly played with death. We know, too, that he was subject to fits of brooding melancholy, and then — let me remind you of this — in his thirty-sixth year he had what some say was an epileptic seizure, an experience which he, however, regarded as a divine revelation. For a short time he renounced the world; his abdication was even thought possible. In Abu-l-Fazl's words: "He was nearly abandoning this state of struggle, and entirely gathering up the skirt of his genius from earthly pomp. The primacy of the spiritual world took possession of his holy form. The attraction of cognition of God cast its ray."'

'For my part,' threw in Hari, 'I cannot believe that he is an epileptic. I suppose the peculiar strain of mysticism running through his character is somewhat suggestive of epilepsy, but, were he a true epileptic, he could not drink as he does without killing himself.'

'I agree,' said the Rajah, 'and I should even hesitate to call him abnormal. He strikes me as being the average man, but raised to a higher power of manhood. One cannot point to any faults or virtues in the average man which he does not possess. He is sensual, a lover of wine and women; boastful, often cruel, avaricious, cunning, hypocritical, and a colossal egoist. He is also an impassioned advocate of abstinence and self-control, humble before God, occasionally generous, simple in his affections, shrewd and credulous in equal degree, and unsparing of toil in the interests of his Throne and Empire. His Majesty is the plain man, I say, raised to a higher power. This constitutes him a natural autocrat. He aspires to make his people great and good as greatness and goodness are understood by him. If his ideas on the subject are a little elementary, that cannot be helped. I am not one of those who make it a grievance that he is great in his own fashion instead of in theirs; although, of course,

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it is hard for some amongst us, who are men of ancient tradition and culture, to accommodate ourselves to a civilization which is of a cruder type than our own, and imposed upon us from without — a civilization essentially materialistic. It is true that the Emperor himself has idealism; and his idealism takes, I admit, a certain grandiosity from the power that is within him; but all the same . . .’ And Amar shrugged and shook his head.

‘The Emperor is not a happy man,’ said Gokal meditatively. ‘This age is his; he has made it. But he is beginning to realize that he has let loose influences that he cannot stem. When he built up an Empire he did not foresee that its culture would be tainted with a newly-born irreligion and vulgarity. When he studied the faith of his fathers he did not foresee that he would lose his belief in it. And when he undertook to supply a unifying greed . . .’

The Rajah nodded. ‘After all, he is more than half a Mongol, and the Mongols are a people of prodigious vitality, but they remain, broadly speaking, barbarians. Are you aware that amongst the rank and file the washing of clothes and of cooking-vessels is still held to be a sin? They will also tell you with pride that Tamerlane was born holding in his hand a piece of clotted blood. They still love dirt, honour violence, and believe in devils.’

‘Whereas we, the civilized, worship cleanliness, honour sophistication, and believe in nothing,’ put in Hari with a smile.

To this no one made any answer, for, at the end of the terrace, a slender white figure had appeared. ‘Is that my friend Mabun Das again?’ said Hari in a low voice.

After a moment the figure came forward, and Mabun Das it was, but the little man seemed somehow a shade different. Was it the absence of his superior that helped him to impart a greater confidence to his bearing? Or was he temporarily lowering the mask with which he concealed a self-confidence that was always there? Be this as it might, he moved very deliberately towards the three who sat watching him, and stood looking down at them with a smile.

‘Well, Mabun Das,’ said Hari genially, ‘will you join us in a last cup of wine?’

Mabun declined with a bow.

‘What is Prince Daniyal doing here at this time of night?’ Hari went on.

The smile on Mabun’s face did not leave it, but it seemed to sink inwards and to take on a meaning that was for himself alone.

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'The hairless cat . . .' he murmured.

'And nothing more?'

Mabun shrugged. 'The Prince always keeps late hours.'

'No doubt, no doubt!' And Hari looked up at the stars.

'He also rises late.'

'I suppose so.' Hari's regard came down again. Every one's eyes were now bent upon Mabun interrogatively, for his gentle voice had a strangely mocking note.

'To-morrow, however, the Prince will rise early,' said Mabun. 'He will rise to witness the execution of four hundred and nineteen men.'

For a few moments no one stirred. Mabun continued to smile, and then suddenly sighed and looked grave. Strangely enough, however, this altered expression seemed just as factitious as the first.

'Yes, gentlemen,' continued Mabun softly, 'it is so! The Emperor signed their death-warrant a few hours ago. These men and women all belong to one or another of the seventy-two secret sects.'

The silence continued. Akbar's recent edicts were well known to all present. They embodied his repeated threats to sweep clean the limbo where religion and lust and every elemental instinct met — met in an obscurity that made their faces all baleful and all alike. A moral and spiritual corruption had set in with the mingling of so many races and creeds. Races copied only each other's vices. Creeds, forced to tolerate one another, learned to tolerate their own decadence. So the Emperor had ordered an inquiry and tabulated the results, he had issued edicts and fixed penalties. But the people had only smiled. The heavens might thunder, but where was the lightning to strike? This sudden bolt, then, might well create dismay. Was it a sign that Akbar had lost his mental balance? Had he not known for years that a subterranean stream of bane was flowing beneath the visible structure of his State? Of course. For years he had known that thousands of his subjects were mysteriously disappearing from the earth. For years he had known that in hundreds of temples and secret meeting-places religious orgies were being held with a frequent accompaniment of human sacrifice. Perhaps it maddened him to be the Emperor of a people whose lives belonged, not to him, but to the Goddess whom he abhorred. In every village, in every city, in the palace itself, he could sniff the sickly taint. Saktism! Thuggee! The worship of the Female Principle! Kali, the Goddess of Birth and Death! Her power, against

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which Akbar warred, was subtle and diffuse as a pestilence. It had its tides, which were governed by the moon or fate. If the number, four hundred and nineteen, was savagely large, it was also comically small; you could multiply it over and over again with no result except that the people would murmur that their Emperor had gone mad.

With these unspoken thoughts in their minds, Mabun's hearers looked at him and wondered. Seeing that he was known to occupy an important position in Akbar's unofficial intelligence service, there was something a little sinister in his present air of detachment. Yet that detachment did not, perhaps, preclude a judgment; that calm was, perhaps, not cynical.

'So they will die in the morning,' said Hari, once more looking up into the night sky.

'Yes. In five or six hours.'

'And how?'

'They will be trampled to death by elephants.'

'And Akbar will look on?'

'No. Only Prince Daniyal.'

Upon this there was another pause. Then Mabun suddenly began to smile his brilliant smile. 'Gentlemen,' he said in lighter tones, 'I am afraid I have turned your thoughts into a rather dismal channel. I offer you my apologies. Before your evening closes, you will revert, I hope, to happier topics.' With that he bade them good night, and for a while after he had gone the others sat there, pensive. The great lantern behind Gokal shone down softly upon the dome of his shaven head. Cross-legged and erect like a Buddha, he looked the very image of meditation. Hari, reclining upon one elbow, still kept his eyes fixed upon the shining constellations. Amar, whose gaze had followed Mabun frowningly until he disappeared through the arch, now reached out and for the first time that evening helped himself to wine. When he had drunk a little he looked deep into the bowl and murmured: 'Gautama has said that as long as men remain bound in ignorance, so long will there be suffering.'

'And evil?' questioned Hari. 'What of that?'

'Evil springs from ignorance and delusion. The fires of lust and anger find no fuel when the delusions attached to individuality have been destroyed.'

Hari gave a brief laugh and turned to Gokal. 'Is it not true that the only religion that was unrepresented at Akbar's debates was Buddhism?'



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Gokal made no reply, but Amar answered for him: 'Yes. And that is significant.'

'Of what?'

Amar's expression was scornful. 'In his Din Ilahi Akbar proclaims himself vice-regent of God upon earth. What should he have to do with a doctrine which teaches that there is no God?'

Hari considered for a minute. 'Amar,' he said at last, 'when it comes to choosing between Salim and Daniyal, on which side will you lean?'

For a space Amar remained silent. 'That,' he said, and his tone was dry, 'that I take to be a question of political expediency.'

Hari laughed. 'Personalities, then, do not count?'

'I know neither Salim nor Daniyal personally.'

'But what have you heard?'

'I gather from what I have heard that they are both, in their different ways, ignorant and foolish men.'

Hari laughed again. 'Is Akbar foolish and ignorant?'

Amar was silent.

'Remember!' said Hari, 'they both have the blood of Akbar running in their veins.'

Still Amar made no answer.

'And Akbar himself,' said Hari, 'can neither read nor write.'

After this there came a long pause, and then Amar slowly rose to his feet. Hari followed his example, but Gokal still remained motionless with bowed head. Going up to him, Hari grasped him with affectionate roughness by the shoulder. 'What is the matter with you, my friend?' he cried. 'The whole evening you have been dumb.'

Gokal looked up for a few instants, then let his head sink down again; and thus he sat, a monumental figure of dejection.

Hari left him and took a turn down the full length of the terrace. When he came back Gokal was standing by Amar's side.

'Amar,' said Hari suddenly, 'let me tell you this: Evil is something more than you think.'

Amar returned Hari's gaze blankly and said nothing; but, undeterred by this lack of response, Hari went on: 'And I will tell you where evil is to be found. In human nature . . . I mean, in the very stuff of life itself. I tell you the word "human" means, fundamentally, nothing beautiful, virtuous, or intelligent, but something merely — strong. Akbar is very human, very average, very strong.'

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As for you, you want to select. But you weaken yourself thereby. Life! its power is what it is. And to deny it is no deliverance. All that is below — whether in Akbar's soul or in the dark spirit of the masses . . .'

He stopped. He looked from Amar to Gokal, then at Amar again.

'This is my conviction, Amar,' he said in a low voice. 'What good men resist is not a mere prompting to pleasure, but something that they fear. Am I not right, Gokal?'

The big Brahmin raised both his hands and pressed them wearily to his eyelids. 'I do not know. I do not know.'

With a frown of sudden anger Hari seized him again by the arm. 'You shall stay here until you have spoken.'

Gokal dropped his hands and sighed. 'What do you want me to say?'

'What you think.'

Amar gave an exclamation of impatience. 'Enough of this!' he cried, and, making a gesture of invitation to Gokal, he moved towards the archway.

Gokal, however, drew himself up and stepped back from both the one and the other with a resentful movement for which neither was prepared.

'You ask for my opinion? Very well. To me the existence of what we call evil — in its many kinds and degrees — suggests the creative activity of numerous agents which may themselves be our own creations. These agents seem to be striving to embody different kinds of values. In nature there are hostilities — battles with victory and defeat. There is what seems to us regress . . . there is perversion . . . there may be a development in evil as well as in goodness, a movement leading down to Satanic abysses of being.'

The Rajah was astonished. Was Gokal associating himself with the vulgar polytheism of the masses? Was he declaring in favour of a Zoroastrian or Manichæan duality? Well, no matter! The tone in which he had delivered himself was petulant. It was not necessary to take him seriously.

Crossing the terrace in silence the three men now passed through the arch and went down the great stairway into the court below. At the Gate they had to wait for a few minutes while Gokal's carriage was being summoned. Beneath them lay the silent city with the moon just rising over the roofs. The night was flooded with a soft, sad

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light, which seemed to Amar to be like a dawn in the underworld, rousing pale ghosts to another spectral day. His heart was full of a vague unrest, and an unusual longing for companionship came over him. Gokal and Hari were about to drive off together, for Gokal had invited Hari to stay with him at his pavilion. He felt sure that they would continue to sit together, exchanging their thoughts until the day broke, and this idea increased his feeling of loneliness. When Gokal invited him to accompany them he accepted.

THE swift little horses trotted noiselessly along the dusty road, the light carriage swayed from side to side, and each of the three friends followed his own silent thoughts. After passing along the empty streets they went through the city gates, and a little further on turned off upon a soft track that ran under the trees of the Royal Hunting Grounds. Dry leaves crackled beneath the wheels; moonlight alternated with shadow; white moths and fireflies danced together among the boughs.

In half an hour the carriage drew up in a lane between the blossoming fruit trees of a small enclosure, and here Hari, who had been looking about him all the time as if to take his bearings, sniffed the air and said: 'I smell water. Are we near the lake?'

In silence Gokal led the way through a narrow gate and up a path that wandered through the trees. Presently a line of slender tamarisks came into view, and the pale surface of a lake glimmered through their feathery leafage. The path now skirted the lake, which was an oblong sheet of artificial water, upon the stone margin of which were seated innumerable frogs. At each step of Gokal's several frogs leapt up and threw themselves into the water with a splash. Hari laughed immoderately.

A few moments later there appeared a long, low building, somewhat Chinese in style. Behind it stretched a row of dark cypresses, in front was a terrace with a flight of broad steps going down to the water. This was Gokal's pavilion. It was built of a hard wood that had weathered to the same silver-grey as the stone of the terrace. Everything was grey in the moonlight except the shining water and the blossom upon two flowering trees, one on each side of the house.

Gokal led the way up the steps on to the terrace and there halted in a kind of dreamy uncertainty. But an old manservant, who had been lying asleep by the door, unrolled himself from his sheet and salaamed. Gokal bade him bring some fruit and some sherbet.

Standing at the end of the terrace, the Rajah looked out over the water. The moon was now dimmed by thin veils of cloud; and her light, diffused over the whole sky, fell gently and evenly upon everything. Tall, slender trees grew all around the lake in which they

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stood reflected; but in the centre, beyond these shadowy reflections, the placid water made a mirror for the grey clouds drifting past.

The Rajah went down the steps and along the water's edge as far as the corner of the lake. There he stood pensive, wrapped in an unexpected peace. The place seemed to him to be hallowed; it seemed to be watching itself, communing with itself; it seemed to be happy in the contemplation of an unchanging tranquillity. This, thought the Rajah, is a picture of the condition towards which the spirit strives, and with this thought there came over him an intense love of the place. Yes, he loved it with intensity. Some day it would surely be granted him to identify himself with this repose, and to exist, selfless, brooding upon the face of these serene waters.

As he stood there the gross fatalities of the earth, the complications of the world, the uneasiness of human relationships, no longer troubled him. He thought of other men only as kindred creatures seeking — even when they knew it not — the tranquillity that is at the end of all desire.

After a while his eyes turned again towards the pavilion, but Gokal and Hari were not visible from where he stood. Slowly he retraced his steps and, mounting the terrace, found them seated upon a mat of rushes, with a low Chinese table spread before them. It was to be supposed that they had been talking together before he came, but now they were sitting silent. Gokal's head was bowed, his face hidden.

'Well, Amar,' said Hari dryly, and he gave a nod in Gokal's direction, 'perhaps you can find out what is the matter with our friend here.'

The Rajah stood over Gokal's massive form, which drooped and sagged as if melted by the fervour of an inward grief. Thoughtfully he considered him. He knew that Gokal was subject to fits of profound melancholy, but his despair concerning the destiny of mankind was not infrequently to be traced to some personal mischance. This was a weakness that the Rajah greatly deplored.

He was still considering what line to take when, in a muffled voice, Gokal pronounced the words: 'I am mourning for one who has died.'

The Rajah was completely taken aback. In silence he and Hari exchanged looks of astonishment.

'A child she was,' continued Gokal without lifting his head, 'a girl of fourteen . . . the daughter of a gardener . . . A snake bit

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her . . . her blood was poisoned and she died yesterday. A young girl, very lovely . . . and dead so young.'

This confession fell so strangely upon their ears that for a minute neither Hari nor the Rajah could find a word to say. At last Hari shrugged and Amar stammered out: 'My dear friend, I had no idea that you had a private sorrow of this kind. I thought . . .'

'Amar!' said Gokal, interrupting, 'the favour of the world is nothing to me any longer. The Din Ilahi will fail in the end because it is a folly, and if, in the meantime, it brings about my ruin, what do I really care! My life is a weariness, and I am no longer young. It is true that I have forfeited my caste, and that the Emperor's protection alone stands between me and disgrace. But whether I live or die, here or in exile, it is all a matter of indifference to me.'

Hari and the Rajah looked at one another again. Gokal's state of mind was worse than they had thought.

At the end of a painful silence Hari pursed his lips and said: 'Obviously, my dear Gokal, you were in love with this girl.'

'She was a child — only a child,' returned Gokal brokenly. He had lifted his head at last, and the Rajah noticed the glistening track of a tear that had rolled down his left cheek. 'Her father is an old man and his other children are unkind to him. His wife is dead. He had looked after Vasumati from her infancy. . . . And now he sits all day upon a stone with his head in his hands. Men laugh at him because it was only a girl; but he moans. "My little love! My little love!" It is a pitiful sight, Rajah, and I hope that he himself will soon die.'

A chill ran down the Rajah's spine. He thought of Jali, thankful that the boy was sleeping safely in his bed. But Jali, to be sure, was not very robust. . . . 'Alas!' he sighed inwardly; 'alas! for poor human fondnesses! Links in the chain! Fetters! Fetters!' Not more than a few minutes ago he had felt free, a spirit rejoicing in its emancipation. But now his heart was flooded with a tenderness for earthly and familiar things; they seemed to him to possess by virtue of their very lowliness a dignity equal to that of deliverance itself.

Having spoken, Gokal buried his face in his hands, now openly overcome by grief. The Rajah was dismayed and even slightly scandalized. But Hari, with a compassionate smile, patted the Brahmin comfortingly upon the shoulder. The silence dragged on until suddenly Hari seemed to weary of sympathizing; with a muttered exclamation he rose to his feet.

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'By all the gods and demons!' he cried, 'how comes it that a man such as he can so lose courage? Why is Gokal subject to the common weaknesses of humanity? He has intelligence. He has knowledge. He has wisdom. He should be glorious, but' — and he pointed to Gokal's huddled form — 'look at him! He weeps like a woman.'

'My dear Hari,' sighed the Rajah, 'he — he cared for this child.'

Hari walked up and down, possessed by an unaccountable excitement.

'Does he not know as well as I that we are all like frogs, like insects — alive one moment and dead the next! We must not mind. . . . Life is a disgrace to those who mind death.'

The Rajah's gaze went out over the lake. 'The human affections are the most tenacious of all the chains . . .'

'Love,' interrupted Hari, 'love makes a man contemptuous of death. That — just that — is what I mean. Does a woman fear her own death or even the death of her lover? No! She fears only the dying of his love.'

The Rajah smiled. 'You are coming down to another level of ideas,' he said rather dryly. 'You can hardly recommend that the whole human race should live on the emotional plane of a woman in love.'

'I do recommend it!' retorted Hari with headlong impetuosity. 'At least I denounce as shameful the emotional plane upon which we nearly all live. We spend our lives fretting over trifles — and running away from death. We live not that we may live, but in order not to die.'

The Rajah shrugged. 'Anyhow, the remedy does not lie, as you seem to imagine, in taking emotional intoxicants.'

Upon this there was silence for a full minute, during which the Rajah and Hari continued to eye one another. Then, laying a hand upon the knee of the heavy bowed figure beside him, the Rajah, too, bowed his head and sat dumb.

With an oath Hari turned on his heel and walked away to the end of the terrace. There a light shelter had been raised against the night dew. In a loud voice he directed Gokal's servant to spread out his couch, then he came back and said: 'Amar, your bleak religion appears to satisfy you. So much the better. To me it seems that you are too easily satisfied.'

The Rajah smiled as if he had it on his lips to make a crushing

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rejoinder, but after a glance at Gokal, he said simply: 'Let those who can find God take refuge in Him.'

Then Gokal stirred; they heard him sigh, and all at once, in a low voice, he quoted the words:

' "Men flee to God for a refuge from a knowledge that doth not profit, from a prayer that is not heard, from a heart that is not humble and a body that is not satisfied." '

Hari look troubled. 'Is that true?' he asked after a moment; 'that we flee to God for those reasons and those only?'

The question went unanswered; Gokal remained without movement and the Rajah only sighed. After looking from one to the other Hari gave a shrug and announced his intention of lying down for a few hours' sleep.

In silence the other two sat there. The moon, now high, seemed to be hanging stationary over the lake; light clouds drifting around her were reflected upon the still grey face of the water; the night seemed endless and changeless.

In his search for something deeply felt to say Amar was sadly perplexed. His sympathies were complicated by embarrassment and even a slight irritation. What concern had this big, grave man of nearly fifty, this philosopher who stood high in the world of learning as well as at Court — what concern had he with an unlettered girl of fourteen, the daughter of a gardener? Gokal's uncontrolled grief was not only pitiful, but scandalous and rather absurd.

With every passing minute his perplexity deepened and, as it deepened, it generalized itself; he brought his own life under survey and then he thought of life as a whole. Were there no certainties anywhere? . . . The lake, lying pale and still before his eyes, breathed a tranquillity that was no longer peaceful, but deadening.

At last he forced himself into speech. 'Gokal,' he said, 'your present grief is no more than a shadow drifting over the surface of your spirit. Wait a little and it will pass.'

Gokal's face had a stony pallor in the moonlight; the hollows of his eyes were dark, but Amar felt a deep, empty gaze encountering his own.

'I am grieving for that girl — yes!' And Gokal paused. 'But I am also grieving for my lost youth. I am regretting all the illusions I have not pursued, all the follies that I have not committed. Yes; it is for these things that I now grieve.'



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Amar's heart contracted. Never before had Gokal sounded this particular note, and the words just uttered seemed to rob him of even the strength to sympathize. A voice within him was asking: 'Does one, then, come to this?' Gokal was no longer a person, but the small, ancient voice of mankind questioning whether life has any meaning, whether effort is not always vain, whether belief is ever true.

It was time to make an end. There are occasions, the Rajah told himself, when one must simply break off and wait for a change of mood. In an altered tone he made up a few sentences of rather conventional encouragement and then rose to take his departure. In his heart he felt miserable and not a little ashamed, but his chief longing was to get away, and he tried hard to persuade his host not to accompany him back to the carriage. Gokal, however, insisted; and, together, in complete silence, they retraced their steps along the margin of the lake and through the shadows of the little wood. The coachman and the groom were asleep by the roadside, even the horses seemed to have gone to sleep. Amar made his adieux with a dryness that he detested all the more in that Gokal's manner to him was perfect. It had the dignity of sorrow with self-effacement.

After he had driven away Gokal stood gazing down the empty lane. 'I have said too much,' he reflected, 'for why should one's friends be troubled? The things I want to say should be said to oneself alone. Let me talk to myself then in solitude — an old fool addressing an old fool. Gokal, you are reckoned a wise man and a learned, but all that you have learned is the simplest and most ancient lesson in the world: it is better to laugh and weep like a child than to follow the wisdom of the wisest. You have travelled down the river of time with a swiftness that you did not see, and the years have carried you unaware into the waste lands of regret. All your life your eyes have been fastened upon the invisible; never did you look up at the fruit trees in the spring, or at the young girls blossoming beside you the full year round. You have studied and pondered — to no profit, gaining nothing but the respect of the simple, who, in reality, are wiser than you. So here, in the end, stands Gokal, with a round back and a round belly and a crushing load of regret.'

Unconsciously he had started into movement and was now shambling aimlessly down the road. He saw nothing, heard nothing, was aware of nothing but his grief. But as he shambled along

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the dawn broke, and when he looked up a ray of light struck upon his face. For a moment he stood still, dismayed, then turned and hurried back towards the house. But the cruel, exquisite dawn was quicker than he. A golden light slanted through the trees, the dew sparkled, the earth rejoiced. And Gokal bent his head and went fast. The beauty of nature in its mindlessness, the beauty of instinct in its thoughtlessness, the beauty of youth in its ignorance — here were the objects of his longing and despair — these were the things that sent him scurrying along to hide like a creature of the night. Stripped of the kindly dark, he glanced shrinkingly from side to side and encountered, all at once, the gaze of two large brown eyes that were staring at him in innocent amazement. It was a little, low-caste lad of ten, who was lost in wonder at the sight of a venerable Brahmin stumbling along with a face bathed in tears.

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At last the moment came. From beneath the city wall, and not far from the city gate, something flashed in the sun. His gaze narrowed and he sprang to his feet. In a minute there were some more flashes and then he knew what to do. His eyes gleamed as he mounted and put his horse down the slope.

Not many days later Makh Khan, accompanied by his family, started on a long, leisurely journey south to Agra. The Khan was obeying Akbar's summons with a better grace than most, for it was probable that the Durbar would close with the marriage of Lalita to Prince Daniyal. He travelled with a cumbrous retinue, made short stages and pitched elaborate camps. In some places where the hunting was good he halted for as much as a week.

This suited Hari perfectly. In the guise of a horse-dealer and accompanied by only one servant, he followed the Khan; his modest tent went up every night at the distance of a mile or two from the Khan's site, and stolen meetings with Lalita could be arranged at the close of nearly every day. During the next eight weeks his contentment was complete. He had found romance with a spice of adventure, movement with leisure, a life lived in the present, unburdened and yet rich. All day he would jog along, now chatting with his man, now lost in a happy dream, but always with the thought of his last half-hour with Lalita or of the next to come. Evening brought him the moments of his joy — as ecstatic, as fleeting as the flaming colours of the sky; then, afterwards, he would sit outside his tent in a trance, or perhaps walk along through the dusk to some bit of rising ground, and from there gaze at the lights of the Khan's great encampment twinkling upon the plain.

At night, when he woke to throw wood on his fire, the stillness was infused with another gentler bliss. He watched the flames leap up and shine upon the little pyramid of his tent, or on the trunks of trees and the underside of leaves, or on some jutting rock that cut against the field of stars. As a rule he was awake in time to see the dawn, and one dawn in particular constantly returned to his memory; the sky was of the purest, palest blue, with a few motionless little clouds poised high. It was so unearthly in its silence and purity that he would have been unsurprised if a bevy of angels had flown across it. The essence of serenity was there: a few stars still twinkling through the light-filled air and the grass grey with dew.

Ah! those had been enchanted days; and even now, in this present, with a meeting round the next bend of the path, he could

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not but cast his eyes backward and stifle a mounting sigh. The first period of the romance was over; the next extended into a most unpromising obscurity. However, to give fortune its due credit, the immediate future looked well enough; the Khan was taking up residence in a garden house of Prince Daniyal's, which was actually on the edge of the Royal Hunting Grounds. For the present, meetings with Lalita could be continued without difficulty.

To while the minutes away he pictured the moment of her coming. First he would hear the thudding of her horse's hoofs, then at the bend of the glade she would appear. Still at a little distance she would pull up, dismount, and throw the reins to her groom. Always she came to him on foot and alone. She would come slowly, looking straight before her and smiling with that deep, glowing smile. During those few seconds the flame of his happiness would soar up to its full height. Anticipation and realization became one and filled him with a double life. Consciousness and self-consciousness, too, worked together, so that he could say of his happiness: 'I have captured it! Here it lies in my hand!'

Stretched out beneath a tree he closed his eyes and there followed an interval during which he was completely lost in his dreams. When he looked at the sun again it was to realize that Lalita was late, and with this came his first twinge of anxiety. From now onwards, he well knew, his disquiet would steadily increase. It would deepen and darken until it became a veritable torment. Was it not strange that only at times such as these did a clear vision of love's miseries come to him? And yet — it was past all question — his happiness during the last two months had been shot through with panics and despairs beyond count. Before him there now lay perhaps an hour of anguish — the time for disappointed hope to burn itself out — then wearily he would get up and go back — dull, spiritless, racked by fears.

To live in one's emotions meant this; it was slavery; he saw it well enough. But was it on that account ignominious? No, he said, no and no! Better this suffering than contentment in the humdrum. It was out of one's subjection to love that love's ecstasies were born. Remember, he said, the sense of lordship over life, the sustained exaltation of days and weeks when you became mindful of ordinary existence only to give it a smile. Think, think again how the world appears to a lover! all those little people down there, ridiculously intent upon the insignificant; look at them, content to let life slip

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past them, as if there were no such thing as love, that present ecstasy; or death, that onward-rushing night! Yes, to the human spirit thus expanded the common scene appeared for all the world like a piece of make-believe. You couldn't conceive that people were not pretending, not playing parts. Good heavens, it was life itself that they ignored! Couldn't they see that love and death alone had any importance — and death only as being the end of love? Well, no matter! He had seen and been content. He had bidden the seas rise and overwhelm him. He had bidden the mountains fall and crush him. Overflowing with life he had been joyously ready for death.

For death? Yes, perhaps. But was one ever resigned to *this*? Sullenly he rose to his feet and with a sullen slowness followed his path back through the wood. Why had Lalita failed him? All the elements of hazard and danger in their intrigue took shape before his eyes. Risks that had added zest to his pleasure in the past now looked merely forbidding; after all, they were *her* risks, too. Her misdoing in the eyes of the world would appear far more outrageous than his. For a girl of her race and station it would have been bad enough in any circumstances, but after having been pledged to a Prince of the Royal House . . . An insult to the Throne! that was what people would say. The fact that she was not as yet actually his mistress made no particular difference; no one would believe it, for one thing; moreover, the exact degree of her culpability would be a trifle, if once a scandal arose compromising the honour of the Prince.

Hari's thoughts might have gone on in this fashion for hours had he not turned upon himself in a sudden burst of rage. Fool! Was this the first time that Lalita had failed to keep an appointment? and the obstacles that had kept her back in the past, although insurmountable, had they not always been quite trivial in themselves? Sanely considered, the present case offered no feature that a man had cause to worry about. And yet he *was* worrying; and just because worry *had* to find a point of focus, he had found one.

At their last meeting — which had taken place only the evening before — a slight misadventure had occurred. He had ridden into Agra a few hours after the Khan, and, as previously arranged, had met Lalita just before sundown at a chosen spot in the Royal Hunting Grounds. The meeting had been hurried, for the light was fading and Lalita was not supposed to stay out after dark. And then

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what had happened was this: he was taking her back to her groom when all at once her horse shied violently, swerving off the narrow forest track. She crashed through some low-growing shrubs, and at the same instant a cry rang out as if someone lying hidden by the wayside had been hurt. He, himself, who was following a few yards behind, quickly caught her up and was successful in seizing the rein of her mount. Upon this she jumped to the ground and was beginning to run back to see what had happened when he called out to her to stop. His tone must have been peremptory, for she obeyed at once. He found it difficult afterwards to remember just what had been in his mind at the time; but, although he had not actually seen anyone at all, he certainly had had an uneasy feeling that several people were lurking in the undergrowth near by. Rather unwillingly he left her to hold the horses and went back a few yards until he caught sight of a crouching figure a little way off the path. It was a woman, and next he perceived that she was bending over a man who lay prone upon the ground. On his nearer approach the woman looked up, and with a quick gesture flung a veil over the man's face. At this he halted. In the dim light little more than the mere outlines of the two figures was visible; but he had already been given a sign that his presence was not wanted, and, for his part, he had no wish to stay. Quickly rejoining Lalita, he told her that there was nothing to be done, and insisted upon her riding off with him at once.

That was the whole episode; and why should his imagination now plague him with the idea that it might in some way be connected with Lalita's failure to appear? On the face of it, nothing could be less likely. The time and place of their rendezvous could not have been known by anybody beforehand; they had ridden away before anyone could have taken note of their appearance; and, lastly, they had not been followed — of that he was quite sure. No; the fancies he was lending himself to were ridiculous.

It was just at the moment when his thoughts were reaching this turn that his ear caught the patter of bare feet running along behind him. He drew sharply and waited. Round the bend came Lalita's groom, a man whom they could both trust. There was a letter in his hand, and when Hari had cast his eyes over it, his whole aspect became different. All was well; Lalita's absence was explained by her having received a message from Prince Daniyal to say that his visit, which should have been in the afternoon, was to be paid in the morning instead. She gave him a rendezvous for the next day.

When Hari went on again his spirits had swung back to an even greater height than before. He was one of those people who enjoy their foolish happinesses all the more for being aware of the folly in them; and in this case he yielded to his emotion with the abandonment of a drug-taker revelling in his drug. Once again he became negligent of everything outside the ecstasy of his love; he snapped his fingers at Prince Daniyal; he waved aside the problems of the future; he shrugged over the accident in the wood. In a happy dream he followed the path back to the pavilion; still in a dream he mounted the steps, and it was not until he found himself face to face with Sita that he came back from his visionary world.

She was sitting on the little terrace all alone. In her smiling eyes, as she looked up at him, he thought he detected a glint of raillery. She had driven over, it appeared, to spend the day with Gokal, Amar having taken himself off to Fatehpur-Sikri on a variety of affairs, one of which — she threw this in rather pointedly — was to pay Ambissa a visit. At the mention of his wife's name Hari's face darkened and he actually gave a frown. 'Well, I see that you, too, are in no hurry to pay visits at Fatehpur-Sikri!' and his tone, unwarrantably enough, seemed to suggest that they were under equally strong obligations. The truth was that confusion was beginning to creep over him at the thought that there was much in his past conduct to account for. Amar could hardly have avoided saying something . . . and she would certainly consider that he had been guilty of *bād taste* — yes, very bad taste — to make the least of it.

As he seated himself beside her he racked his brains for something

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to say. Gokal had just sent out word that he was not to be expected for another half-hour; in the meantime here was Sita, looking so charming, and also — he was sure of it now — faintly disdainful.

Although they were old acquaintances, they were not by any means intimate. He could not do otherwise than suppose that she shared Amar's general disapproval of him; but then she was by no means fond of Ambissa; she viewed her sister-in-law's weaknesses far less tolerantly than Amar, he knew that; so it was reasonable to hope that her attitude towards him on the whole . . . Whilst he was thus inwardly considering, the talk fell to her, and friendly as her tone was, it sounded just a shade too even, too balanced, in his ear. When she said something again about her approaching sojourn in the hills, distractly he answered that Gokal, too, had taken a house in the Khanjo valley, so it appeared that he would be a near neighbour of theirs.

'Yes, and I am simply delighted to hear it!'

'I expect you will see me there as well. Gokal has asked me to pay him a visit.'

He said this without thinking; as a matter of fact he had made no plans, his sole concern at the present time being to keep in touch with Lalita. But directly he had spoken he had cause to regret it, for although Sita again exclaimed, this time, he felt, there was little more than politeness behind her phrases.

In a moment his mind was made up. 'Sita!' he said suddenly, 'I am sure that what you are thinking about me is not at all to my advantage. I want you to let me explain about last night. Yes, please!' he went on, as she gave a little laugh of protest, 'I insist upon your listening. Perhaps your opinion will not be very different when I have done, but I do want you to know the truth.'

She opened her eyes as if in wonder at his earnestness. 'Of course, I will listen, if you like.'

'First of all I have to apologize for my visit. It was not the right thing to do.'

For a moment she hesitated. 'I think you were using me as a blind.'

He coloured. 'Not in the way you think. It is not true that I have been making love to one of your maids. I made use of that suggestion when I saw the opportunity arise; but it is not the truth.'

'Oh!' She looked straight at him in surprise. 'Then you were lying to Narsing when you said . . .'



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'No. For I am not carrying on an intrigue with anyone at all in the palace. Really I can hardly explain even to myself the impulses that came to me that evening and made me act as I did. I can only tell you that I had an instinct to do something peculiar in order to throw people off the scent . . . in order to build up, if possible, some kind of alibi. The truth is, you see, that I had had an accident a little earlier — in the Royal Hunting Grounds — an accident in which I and another were involved. I think we escaped the risk of subsequent recognition, but as a precaution . . .' And his looks asked her to make the best of what was, to be true, a rather obscure explanation.

'But — was that accident a very serious affair?'

He shrugged. 'I cannot tell. Probably not.'

'Well! Why, then, was it so important . . .?'

'Who can tell, in this world, what is important and what is not?'

'There must have been something in your mind,' murmured Sita, after a pause.

He threw himself back with a laugh. 'You are right. You are right. But' — and he laughed again — 'God knows what I had in my mind.'

She regarded him with a good deal of curiosity, but said nothing.

'As luck would have it,' he went on, 'my attempt at an alibi succeeded astonishingly well. Dear old Narsing demonstrated to his complete satisfaction that it was before sunset I entered the palace. I believe Mabun Das is convinced of it too. And Mabun being at the head of Akbar's private spy service, I could hardly have done better.' He chuckled. 'Whatever comes of that accident, no one is now likely to connect *me* with it.'

Sita reflected. 'It is quite clear that you are afraid something *will* come of it.'

Hari shook his head, laughing. 'No. That is just a kind of superstitiousness. The small unexpected things in life so often turn out to be the most disastrous. Wherever I look I see chance ruling the world, and I resent it. And yet,' he went on, after a pause, 'why should I resent it? My purposes are usually ill-judged and chance really does me a kindness in defeating them. Yes, I am lucky; for, after defeating me, chance quite often throws an unimagined wind-fall at my feet.'

If this was an endeavour to engage Sita's interest, it appeared to fail in its object. While he looked into her face she looked steadily

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out over the sunlit lake, and he was unable to feel that he had done himself very much good. During the ensuing silence his thoughts always came helplessly back to this: 'If only I could tell her that I am in love — seriously in love!' But that could not be said.

All at once she smiled to herself, and this he interpreted hopefully. 'Don't judge me harshly!' he pleaded.

'Why do you set me up as a judge? What does my opinion matter? Anyhow, my dear Hari, I don't understand you at all.'

'Oh, yes!' he assured her.

'I don't,' she persisted, laughing. 'I mean I can't make out what you live *for*.'

'But do you know what other people live for?'

'Others do seem to have some sort of focus. They have religion, obligations, ambition — or something. But, of course,' she added hastily, 'I have no right to talk to you like this.'

A faint colour had appeared on her cheeks; and her eyes wandered; she was going to get up.

Hari leant forward. 'Have you considered what is left to a man like me — living in this age, under Akbar? Ambition has been crushed, obligations are out of fashion, and as for religion — well, there is really too wide a choice. I was brought up as a Moslem, but' — and he shrugged — 'Allah, alas! has not kept me orthodox. I have a wife and children, it is true, but — their ways, their tastes, are not mine, I once had political responsibilities, but the Emperor has been graciously pleased to remove them. Well, my dear Sita, what is left?'

There was enough truth in this to give her pause, and as for engaging in argument, that would have been to presuppose a foundation of intimacy that was not there. Although strong in her own faith she was not given to proselytizing; on the subject of Hari's delinquencies as a husband she could not have spoken with much warmth of feeling, for her sympathies did not fall naturally on Ambissa's side; and as for his public duties — well, here no doubt there was something to be said. She could remind him that there had been a time when he had enjoyed the Emperor's favour in a quite unusual degree. She could say that he ought not to find it difficult to win back Akbar's regard, and obtain some honourable post in the Imperial Service. But really she had no particular desire to advance anything; why should she? And while she was still hesitating Gokal made his appearance; on the whole, to her relief.

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In the talk that followed Hari took a very small share. A veil of preoccupation descended over him, and Sita, although slightly intrigued, made no attempt to penetrate it. At a little distance, under the trees by the lake, Jali was trying his luck with rod and line, and presently he let out a shout of mingled triumph and consternation, for he had caught a fish. They all had to hurry down to help him take it off the hook and throw it back into the water before it could come to any harm. Whilst this operation was in progress, Hari, who took no active part in it, stood behind looking out over the water, and for a few moments, rapt utterly away, he was with Lalita in another world. Moreover, it so happened that in one of these moments Sita raised her head. He was never to know it, but her glance rested upon him briefly; the next second she was bending down again, deeply busied with the deliverance of the little fish.

IN the afternoon, during the hour of siesta, Hari rose from his couch and quietly left the house. What took him out in the heat of the day was his anxiety to recover a riding-whip, which Lalita had dropped — at least so she said in her letter — close to the scene of the accident. There was just a chance that this whip, if picked up by someone else, might lead to her identification, for, set in its handle was a sapphire of unusual beauty, a present from Prince Daniyal. He set out, accordingly, determined to make a thorough search. But, to begin with, it was not easy to find the place again, and when at last he found it, he hunted for the whip in vain. Vexed, he was on the point of going back when the idea came to him to explore that region of the wood on the chance of coming upon some clue to the character of the mysterious party and their business in the neighbourhood. Faint tracks seemed to indicate that they had taken a small, winding path that went off into the very thick of the undergrowth. He followed these traces for about a mile, and then came to a small clearing. In the middle stood a bungalow, not unlike Gokal's, but smaller, and in a condition of decay. He stood staring at it for some time before advancing across the open ground; for although the clearing was overgrown with weeds and the building itself bore every sign of desertion, he could not prevent himself from imagining that someone was peeping at him from behind the closed shutters. At the door he paused again; from the roof there hung down wisps of dry, grey moss; ants had built a nest against the threshold and the droppings of wood-pigeons whitened the window-sills. Contrary to his expectations the latch came up when he tried it; the door opened and a curious smell spread upon the fresh air. Its chief ingredients, to be sure, were rotting wood, decayed matting and bats' dung; but, to his perplexity, there mingled with these odours the sweet scent of a certain flower. He recognized the scent quite well, but could not at the moment recall from what flower it came.

On either side of the entrance hall there was a door. He tried each in turn and found them locked. None of the other rooms, however, were locked and he found them dusty and bare. On his return to the entrance hall he noticed that it was from the room on the right

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that the smell of flowers came; it filtered through a lattice that ran high up along the wall. Drawing the hunting-knife from his girdle he attacked the lock and in a few seconds the door yielded. The interior of the room was dark, but from the threshold he could see some objects thrown down in a corner, and gradually his eyes distinguished two or three rolls of rugs, several large bundles wrapped up in white linen, and a great heap of dark flowers. As he stood there a moth fluttered out and blundered into his face; it was a big, white moth, exactly like those that had kept flying into Lalita's face the evening before. His eyes following it about in its blind, aimless flight, he fell into a profound muse.

What roused him at last — or so it seemed to him — was the very intensity of the surrounding silence. It was a silence that magnified every little tick of sound that dared to impinge upon it. Outside the house there was, indeed, the vibration of insects' wings, but inside nothing, nothing.

At last he stirred from his place; he went into the dusky room and threw back one of the shutters. He unfolded the rugs and found them to be of the finest quality; the bundles contained food, wine, spirits, silver drinking-vessels and some sashes of scarlet silk. The flowers, which had looked black, turned out to be, likewise, scarlet. Having finished this examination, he stood up straight; with pursed lips he nodded slowly to himself; a light — a partial light — had dawned upon him.

Several minutes went by during which he stood looking out through the unshuttered window and frowning intently; he stood there until some fancied sound behind caused him to spin round with a start. After this he closed the shutter and left the room, drawing the door to behind him. Across the passage stood the other door, closed, challenging; his eyes rested upon it in dubiety, and then he again drew his hunting-knife and set to work with a quiet but vigorous hand. A few strong thrusts sufficed; the door opened, revealing a room similar to the other and shuttered, but, facing west as it did, the fierce afternoon sun beat in through the broken slats. There was light enough to show him — in the corner opposite — a girl lying asleep, or rather only half asleep, for she had been disturbed by his forcing of the door. Still, as it seemed, in a dream she lay there, but her eyes were open and staring. His entry, to all appearances, moved her no more than this: that she lifted her lids to stare at him with wonder.

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For his part, Hari stared, and there was no further movement on either side, until, leaning back against the doorpost, he gave her a smile and good day.

That smile lingered on during a further interval of complete silence. She was so lovely, this girl, that while his eyes rested upon her he could not help smiling for pleasure. The freshness of childhood was still hers; what her last year had added was softness and bloom and a depth of luminous secrecy behind the eyes — those eyes that veiled — and in so doing betrayed — a consciousness of sex and beauty. As now she moved into a sitting posture, her light garment falling away, revealed a perfect neck and shoulders. At this she looked down and away, but made no other movement, and still she said nothing.

When Hari addressed her again it was to ask what she was doing there, and who she was. But to these, the most obvious of questions, she seemed unready to make reply. With eyes that looked beyond him rather than at him she murmured that she had been asleep; and vaguely, but enchantingly, she smiled.

After her voice had died away a gradual change came over Hari's face. His gaze became shrewder; he could place her; she was one of millions. Millions were like her in all respects save one — they lacked her astonishing beauty. Carelessly did the potter scatter these common vessels over the earth, so carelessly that when one, such as this, chanced to come flawless from his wheel, no notice did he take, no provision did he make. This was a common flower that might blossom on any dunghill and fall to any fate. Moreover, unless beauty had its special rights, who could say that she deserved better?

Abruptly he fell to questioning her, and there was now a certain sharpness in his tone. But his gaze had already revealed admiration and it was from this that she took her cue.

Playing with the folds of her dress, fingering the braids of her hair, she gave answers that told him nothing. She was as baffling as a stubborn child.

It was not long before he adopted another line. 'Let me tell you something. I have been into the other room,' he said.

For the first time she showed a trace of disquiet; her gaze seemed to darken, although it remained steady.

'I know,' he went on, 'what you are here for.'

Did he? She tried to brazen it out with a laugh. Well; he knew

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more than she did! She had no idea — no! She supposed she must have been drugged. And her lids dropped again, her lips parted in a delicate suggestion of a yawn.

One might well have lost patience, and Hari was half ashamed of himself for not doing so. To be sure, she was deserving of pity, but pity could do nothing for her. Her obstinacy made a fool of him, and the answer was to shrug and leave her. But he was not content to do this until he had found out one thing. After casting about for a moment, he made a fresh start.

‘How do you know that I am not one of you?’ he asked softly.

She continued to fix him with her deep but guarded stare.

‘In any case you had better be frank; if I choose, I can denounce you.’

‘But I’ve not done anything! Tell me, what have I done?’

‘You came here last night in a company of Vamacharis — Followers of the Left-hand Way.’

She was silent.’

‘Are you not aware that the Maharaj, the Shah-in-Shah, His Imperial Majesty Akbar, has ordered that the Vamacharis are to be trodden to death under elephants?’

Oh, it was a shame, a shame! And she shuddered. It was cruel to frighten a girl like that! What should she know of such things? Nothing! Nothing! And there was a sob in her voice.

Hari came up to her, grasped her beautiful arm and drew her to her feet. At the touch of his hand she at once became self-conscious, cast down her eyes and bent her head. He stood over her, very close.

‘Lovely one, what is your name?’ he murmured.

She put her beads up to her lips, and although her face remained hidden he could guess that she was regaining confidence. This was the kind of approach she knew best how to meet.

‘Tell me, what is there to prevent me . . . in such a lonely place . . . from plucking this Flower of Delight?’

Her silence gave him his answer.

Compassion again stirred within him. To be so beautiful and to hold oneself so cheap!

‘And if I promise not to betray you,’ he said softly, ‘will you then not cease to be afraid?’

Drawing her into his arms: ‘How old are you?’ he whispered.

She was fifteen.

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Did she live in Agra?

No, her father had a vegetable plot outside the city gates.

How came it that she was not married?

They were poor.

Of her lovers was there not one she preferred?

Rippling with a soft amusement, she shook her head.

'Tell me,' he whispered persuasively. 'Have you acted as a Yogini before?'

She looked up with rounded eyes. 'A Yogini?'

'That's what they call those who represent the Goddess.'

'Oh, I thought you meant the other kind — a Dhuta. I thought: "O, my mother! does he take me for an evil spirit?"' And she laughed quite gaily.

'Tell me, O Lotus of the Dawn, tell me, why were the rites not celebrated last night?'

'Because there was an accident,' she replied, but not without slight hesitation.

A smile of intelligence — which she could not see — flickered over Hari's face.

'An accident!' he echoed in a tone of surprise. 'What was that?'

Very briefly she told him. 'One man was hurt — stunned. The horses knocked him down.'

'And those two riders, the man and the woman, did anyone recognize them? Would any one of you know them again?'

She shook her head. 'I don't think so. It was too dark.'

'Who was the injured man?'

'Oh,' she cried out, 'I don't know him.'

Hari paused. Was it his own arms that had stiffened or her body within them? After a sigh, he said simply: 'I wonder!'

That was as far as he got; his further questions elicited nothing — nothing except that her party had brought her here, given her food and wine (the wine was infused with poppy; he could smell it in her breath) and bidden her wait until they came again.

Not long after this he bade her good-bye, and he could see that his going caused her not only relief but astonishment. Without doubt she had expected to pay a price for his promise of discretion. But she had already given him more than she knew. Just as he was leaving, however, he received a slight shock of discomfort. His eye caught the gleam of something bright that had slipped down between the wall and her mattress. Could it be the handle of Lalita's



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riding-whip? He had to refrain from questioning; it would have been quite impossible to claim the whip; and inquiries might have aroused suspicion. All that he could do was to stumble against the mattress in an endeavour to shift it and give himself a better view of the intriguing object. But the manœuvre failed.

Time and again in the next few days Hari's thoughts went back to the girl, and from that starting-point they wandered off along shadowy avenues of speculation. Although he had already taken Gokal into his confidence as regards Lalita, he abstained, for some reason or other, from telling him anything about this encounter. Nor did he say anything to Lalita about it. She, since her arrival in Agra, was showing symptoms of a new nervousness, a new dread of being found out, and her anxieties at the present time attached themselves in particular to the loss of her riding-whip. About that she was superstitiously apprehensive. Had he been able to provide her with complete reassurance he would, perhaps, have spoken out, but the story would be bound to disquiet her and to stimulate her curiosity rather than satisfy it. What could he find to explain to her about the Vamacharis, that sect, the very name of which was not pronounced in polite society? And then she would be sure to ask how seriously the man had been injured, and who he was. This last question was one that he was particularly anxious she should not fasten upon. In his own mind it was troublesome already. When his thoughts went back to the girl's: 'Oh, I don't know him!' he found imagination and memory inextricably confused. His efforts to recover her exact look and intonation only added to his uncertainties. Had the significance of that exclamation disclosed itself to him rightly at the time or had it not? He had received the impression that she wouldn't confess to knowing the man because it would be dangerous. Why dangerous? Because he was a personage. She wouldn't *dare* to know him or even to know who he was. No, no! She had more sense than that.

Such was the meaning that Hari gave to her cry, and the reason why it suggested itself so readily was that it went to confirm an earlier suspicion. The injured man, stretching his length upon the ground, had presented what seemed to him, even in that uncertain light, a figure of some consequence. He couldn't have said exactly why, for no detail of the lineaments or even of the dress had been discernible, but the impression had been definite. And now another idea shot into his mind — this time a very extravagant one.

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What, he questioned, had Daniyal been doing in Agra at that hour of the night when he had called upon Narsing with some ridiculous inquiry about a hairless cat? Might not the Prince have put in his appearance in obedience to an impulse somewhat similar to his own? The theory was so attractive that it took him some time to convince himself that it stood upon no solid ground whatever. Moreover, when he came to think of it, the figure lying prone had almost certainly been that of a man taller and leaner than Daniyal. It suggested Salim rather than Daniyal. But Salim was at Allahabad.

The days went by and he had almost succeeded in forgetting his last adventure, when, looking out of a back window of Gokal's house one morning, he saw the same girl chatting with the women at work over the trough for linen. He was amazed, and not a little disconcerted. What business had that creature here? What did her presence mean? In this land of subterranean connections, in this land of rumours, denunciations, and blackmail, anything was possible. An angry, helpless suspiciousness assailed him. He went off on the spot to find Gokal; he would tell him all he knew and demand to have the girl's presence explained.

After hearing him out with great interest Gokal broke into exclamations. 'Why have you kept this from me until now? I believe I can tell you who she is at once. It must be Gunevati, the sister of poor little Vasumati. . . . Her father told me that he was going to send for her to take Vasumati's place. You say she is pretty? But she cannot be the equal of Vasumati, who was an angel of loveliness. Let me send for her and we shall see.'

Vasumati, as Hari remembered, was the girl whose death had so deeply affected his friend, and it was plain that this news about her sister had thrown him into some excitement. He could not help laughing. 'Send for her later — not now.' And he explained that he hadn't the smallest wish ever to see Gunevati again. 'After what I have told you,' he went on, 'you will, I imagine, find some excuse for sending her away.'

Gokal looked a little confused. He mustn't act harshly, he objected. Her father was a devoted servant; the business would not be so simple, for the truth must be kept from the old man at all costs. Hari turned away to hide a smile, and decided to say nothing more for the moment. When Gokal had taken time to think, he could hardly fail to realize that no one of his caste and position could

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risk keeping a girl such as Gunevati in his neighbourhood. And, having an appointment with Lalita, he hurried off.

Of late Lalita and he had not been able to see much of one another; and in other ways, too, the outside world was making itself felt. They found it impossible to ignore the problem of the future any longer; they discussed it by the hour, but no conclusions of any kind were reached. Lalita's marriage was not yet imminent, but its shadow lay constantly between them; the girl could not refrain from bringing Prince Daniyal's name into the conversation at all moments, and this vexed Hari considerably. By nature he was not jealous and his resentment expressed itself chiefly in anger against the pressure of the world; yet, little by little, his feelings towards Daniyal took on the colours of animosity. Four years ago, he had been entrusted by Akbar with the business of instructing the Prince in the art of the chase, and thus he and the youth of sixteen had been thrown into a comradeship that was not one of their own choosing; and, although they had seemed to get on well enough at the time, since then they had fallen completely apart. Hari found it strange that his thoughts should once again be turned upon Daniyal through this particular chain of events. There were moments when he still dallied with the idea that it was, after all, Daniyal who had been knocked down by Lalita's horse, and if this were so, if Daniyal were in truth a Follower of the Left-hand Way, it could almost be counted a duty (as it certainly would be a pleasure) to denounce him and bring about such a scandal that the match would be broken off.

One morning, as he was actually nursing these thoughts, on his way back from a meeting with Lalita, at a turn of the woodland path his eyes fell upon the slender figure of Gunevati, who was loitering beside the way. There was something in her aspect which suggested that the meeting was no accident, and as he came up he looked her sternly in the eyes. She saluted him with a newly-found deference, and broke at once into low-voiced entreaties, begging him to take pity upon her father and herself, and not to influence the holy Brahmin against her. The Brahmin was ready to believe in her repentance — and, in truth, she had already renounced all her evil ways. Without the protection of the holy Brahmin she and her father would wither like uprooted plants.

Hari continued to regard her stonily. He was sorely tempted to question her further on the subject of the accident, but caution pre-

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veiled. Seeing that his eyes remained unrelenting, the girl at last bowed her head. In sadness she plucked a twig and let it fall to the ground in token of her resignation to fate.

'Your friends of the other night — let *them* care for you!' said Hari with a resolute brutality. 'Will they let you starve — you, an incarnation of the Great Goddess?'

She was silent.

Curiosity crept into Hari's fixed regard. That her companions had chosen her was no wonder, but what did she make of that call?

'I know your rites,' he continued after a moment. 'Your *upacharas*, I know them.' He threw scorn into his voice and watched for her colour to rise.

'They are not pretty — your rites!' And he laughed the laugh of disgust.

'The rites are the rites of the Great Mother.'

'You believe that? You believe in her?'

'Everyone believes in her.'

He shrugged. 'Not everyone worships her with those rites.'

'They are prescribed.'

'Why then are they hidden — if there is no shame?'

She was silent.

'Are you not also ashamed?'

For a moment she raised her eyes to his. 'I stand for the Divinity. I am worshipped according to the prescribed rites.'

'What of the other Divinities?'

'The Great Mother is the strongest. Kali's is the power.'

She spoke as one uttering an obvious truth, and her tone reduced Hari to speechlessness. Perhaps her unconscious cynicism was deep enough to be accounted innocence. Yes, assuredly, she had the innocence of an animal; and yet . . . In perplexity he said: 'But surely to you, a girl so young — those things must have seemed strange?'

She lifted her head once more and gave him a sidelong glance. It was almost ironical and seemed to be accompanied by the shadow of a smile.

'Many things seem strange to a girl at first,' she replied.

With a gesture Hari left her and passed on.

THE Durbar, with a long programme of ceremonies and festivities, was now in full swing, and deeply absorbed as he was by his private affairs, Hari was obliged, like everybody else, to fall into place and play his allotted part. The calls upon Lalita's time, too, were certainly no less urgent; her betrothal to the Prince, by this time an open secret, was soon to be publicly announced, and she was already enjoying a foretaste of the honours that would soon be showered upon her. When she and Hari met together now they brought a host of preoccupations with them, and the early days of their intimacy already seemed very remote. There was no falling off of their passion, but it was beginning to be a cause of constant unrest and anxiety.

In one respect fortune continued to be kind. Prince Daniyal was not pressing his suit with any impatience and the date of the marriage remained as distant and uncertain as ever. But what was to happen in the end? What was to be the outcome of this intrigue, which was becoming more dangerous every day? Lalita, to be sure, had no notion, and up to the time of their arrival in Agra, Hari had been obstinate in his refusal to look the future in the face. His problem linked itself on one side to the question whether he had any chance of obtaining a divorce from his wife. There was not much hope of success, for the Emperor's sanction would be necessary, and it was to be expected that the rigour of Akbar's present views on marriage would be stiffened by energetic protests from Ambissa herself. She would object with all the weight of her unquestioned virtue behind her, and public sympathy would be on her side. A divorced woman's standing was little better than a widow's; divorced, she would be obliged to retire from Court.

Any compunction that Hari might have felt on this score, had, however, been destroyed by a recent act of hers. He had just discovered that she had not only become a convert to the Emperor's new religion, but had induced his sons, who were still mere striplings, to follow her example. This action overwhelmed him with rage and wiped out his last scruples. He would have made an urgent appeal to the Emperor without another moment's delay, had any circum-

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stances arisen to bring the second half of his programme, marriage to Lalita, anywhere within the realms of possibility.

After an interview with Ambissa, in which he gave himself the pleasure of being extremely disagreeable, he came back to Gokal and said: 'I am prepared to admit that my wife is in many ways an admirable woman. She has strength of character, a sense of duty, principles — not high, perhaps, but strong — and no vices, at least in the popular acceptation of the word. Seeing her again after a long absence I am forcibly struck by her good points.'

'But . . . ?'

'But — our incompatibility of temperament is complete.'

'Is she still fond of you?'

'No. In fact, I think she would hate me if her pride would allow it. She was fond of me once, perhaps; but her affection has faded with the discovery that she cannot alter my nature. She is lucky in that her boys take after her. I consider them prigs; and they, no doubt, have a corresponding opinion of me. But Ambissa loves them as no one else in the world. She is without passion, and her manless state has been irksome to her simply because, having married me, she has felt she had a right to me. Her pride has been injured by the thought of what her friends might be saying; if she has wanted me back, it was not for love's sake, but simply for the sake of appearances. There was a day when she was ambitious for me as well as for herself and her children; she wanted me to make myself a position at Court. That ambition dwindled down to the hope that I would at least live decorously by her side; while *she* worked for the family's advancement; all that she now asks is that I should provoke no scandal and allow her a good share of my income.'

This was the whole of what Hari had to say about the interview, but to her brother, the Rajah, Ambissa found a great deal more to report. Amar had chanced to come in not many minutes after Hari had made his departure, and he found her still flushed and palpitating. This agitation soon wore off, but she remained perturbed by the threat of divorce.

After listening to her recital the Rajah only smiled. 'Not even Hari,' said he, 'can find the effrontery to present himself before Akbar with the claim that your adoption of the new religion constitutes grounds for divorce. Those may very well be his private feelings — and there may be others who will sympathize with him; but it would hardly be tactful to present that plea to the Emperor.'

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With these words the Rajah passed on to another topic, for his sister's action filled him with a secret shame. Perhaps it was to be expected that in the course of time a good many among the Emperor's immediate entourage would stoop to this ignoble form of flattery, but only a few had so demeaned themselves as yet. Ambissa, in her own case, had exhibited an undignified haste, an unseemly alacrity, and, of course, in regard to the boys her conduct was monstrous.

With each day that now went by Hari realized more clearly than ever that his past relations with Lalita had been marked by a singular irresolution and that this could not possibly continue. It was actually a fact — and Gokal, whom he had taken into his confidence, was truly astonished when he heard it — that Lalita was not yet his mistress. Could he, then, at this hour, make up his mind to draw her still further into the tangle of difficulties and dangers that beset their intrigue? Past experience had taught him that the fulfilment of his passion generally marked the beginning of its decline, and now less than ever did he feel disposed to sacrifice her to what might well prove to be a passing infatuation. Nevertheless, the time had come when he had to count chiefly upon his own self-restraint, and this was possible only because he had passed beyond the age of wanton impetuosity. But he was also aware that the moment inevitably arrives when to delay makes a lover ridiculous and is apt to cost him not only what he might have had, but what he already has.

It fell to Gokal to be the witness of Hari's tortures of indecision. One day he would say: 'I shall go to Akbar and make a desperate bid for divorce and re-marriage. Although I am older than Lalita, our marriage would give us ten years' happiness at least. And who has the right to ask for more?' Then a little later he would declare: 'Our love is real enough; but Lalita, like me, is not made for settled happiness. It is perhaps not unfortunate that our marriage is out of the question. My proper course is to run away with her. She is destined for romance, and romance thrives only on adversity. She would be happier with an outlawed lover than with a comfortable husband.' And yet an hour after he would very likely be making a great show of reason to explain that, although a life in the wilds would suit him well enough, it would certainly become intolerable to Lalita, who was habituated to all the diversions of civilization.

Against this same civilization and against Lalita's upbringing he

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inveighed with a concentrated bitterness. 'Don't talk to me about her parents!' he would exclaim. 'She owes them nothing at all! And I, for my part, have no scruples whatever in their regard. Her father is a big, heavy, arrogant man inflated with pride of birth; her mother is worldly and hard. Lalita's training, from her earliest years, has been calculated to turn out a young female of the greatest possible seductiveness — the idea being that her allurements should purchase her a high place in Society. All her mother's thought has gone to details of dress, deportment, and toilet. The girl has been given the equipment of a courtesan, her innocence, her virginity, being reckoned merely as an added grace. Long before vanity came to lend her patience, she was compelled to give most of her time and thought to the art of arousing men's desire. And now, I ask, has all that been fair to her — or to *me*? A trap was set, and the wrong victim happens to have fallen into it. For victim I am; and as such, why should I be considerate towards my snarers? As for Lalita, it speaks well for her that she has not acquired the heart as well as the arts of the courtesan. It is to her honour that she has been wilful, reckless, and defiant, in her sense of wrongdoing. "We love one another!" she says; and at once it becomes a delicious and justifiable proclivity to give without thought of gain.'

Gokal was sparing in reply, having the wit to see that nothing he could say would be of any avail. In the privacy of his own mind he both marvelled and pitied, for although by nature inclined to sentiment, his ideas about love had the cut-and-dry cynicism of the pure theorist. It was true that Hari would sometimes cry out in a fury: 'What did God make young women for, if not to be seduced?' But he would also spend much time in reviewing the many excellent reasons for going no further. Most of these reasons took their point from the character of the girl herself. 'Lalita,' he explained, 'is under the tyranny of what she calls her conscience. But this conscience, the product of a schoolroom morality, is quite unsupported by true conviction. Instinct bids her obey the promptings of her heart; but her false conscience loads her with fears. It exaggerates in her that dislike of the furtive which is common to nearly all of us and amounts in reality to little more than the dread of the shame of being found out. It is much easier to defy the world with a spectacular gesture than to endure for long the strain and risk of cheating it.'

Hari was speaking with a certain bitterness because he could not



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induce Lalita to shoulder even the smallest share of responsibility for the issue. She used her intelligence to evade every appeal that was made to it. Unconsciously she demanded to be coerced, and allowed every small advance in their intimacy to be followed by an intensification of her scruples and fears. For some time past their meetings had taken place in a deserted hunting-box in the Royal Hunting Grounds, a building almost exactly similar to the one in which the encounter with Gunevati had occurred. He had secretly fitted up one of the rooms with all the things required for their comfort, and in the privacy of this retreat he and she sometimes managed to spend as much as half a day together. What happened on these occasions was that, after sharing a light meal with him, Lalita would yield to his instances and stretch herself out upon the divan for a siesta. The hours they had passed upon that couch together certainly left very little value in her virginity; and now he could not help reflecting that if her surrender had been complete from the beginning they would have been saved many scruples that had worn rather thin and many heart-searchings that were likely to be useless. Even their parting, if it came, would wear an ambiguous aspect; it would come, not because they willed it, but because they had lacked the strength to will otherwise.

In this condition of affairs very little was required to precipitate a crisis. With the exception of Gokal, Hari had admitted no one into his confidence — not even the best of his women friends, Srilata Begum. And yet it was through the agency of Srilata that the crisis ultimately arose. This remarkable woman was a half-sister of Amar's and Ambissa's, but just as they bore small resemblance to one another, so she had little in common with either of them. If, like Ambissa, she had a fondness for the world, the attraction she yielded to was of a very different order. What she looked for was not an enhancement of her own social value, but simply entertainment. If she had early dropped out of the high society so assiduously courted by Ambissa, it was for no other reason than that it bored her. A certain level of culture, a good deal of sophistication and a ready wit — this was what she demanded of her company. The air of the court was too heavy; solid virtues, solid abilities, unrelieved by finesse, did not interest her any more than commonplace stupidity or vice. On the other hand, although, like Amar, she had a consciousness awake to spiritual things, she was entirely lacking in his intellectual and moral fervour and had no other aim than to live

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lightly. She could endure a dilettantism and triviality that positively nauseated her brother, and she was tolerant of every variety of spiritual corruption. This tolerance of vileness in others stood in singular contrast to the high standard which she set up for herself. Amar did not misunderstand her on this point, but he had no taste for visiting her house, and as for Ambissa, whilst less sensitive to its atmosphere, she shunned it simply because she felt herself to be, intellectually, at a disadvantage there.

The friendship between Hari and Srilata had arisen at a time when Ambissa had pressed her sister into the role of peacemaker. Hari was then living in Agra and the friendship thus initiated had quickly developed into intimacy. In Amar's eyes there was something almost as incongruous about this alliance as about Hari's alliance with Gokal. But there it was!

There would have been nothing unnatural in Hari's turning to Srilata in his perplexities and laying the whole story of his love affair before her. But this he had not done. Moreover, soon after his arrival in Agra, when Lalita mentioned to him that she had made Srilata's acquaintance, his only response — thrown out in an offhand way — was that he knew her and considered her very good company. What was not his astonishment, therefore, when now — after many weeks during which Srilata had not been mentioned — Lalita came out with the news that *she* had told Srilata everything, had poured out the whole tale of her troubles and asked for advice.

For quite an appreciable interval after hearing this Hari stared in silence. To have had recourse to a sister of Ambissa's seemed an extraordinary proceeding, but — if Lalita had really known what she was about — it showed a pretty gift of discrimination. There was a queer look in Hari's face as he asked what Srilata's advice had been. Lalita had already said that she had come away from the interview charmed, sustained, comforted; but all she could now find to answer was: 'She said it was all very difficult; one had to think . . . and why didn't you come and see her?'

Hari smiled. He recognized Srilata's loyalty, circumspection, and freedom from prejudice. He would go — of course; he promised Lalita that; and then, after they had parted, he retired into a long communion with himself. Or no! It was rather with an evocation of Srilata that he communed, and the results were truly astonishing. Up till now he had cherished the belief that he had given his love affair a scrutiny from every possible angle. And yet, as he now

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rehearsed, step by step, the scene of the colloquy before him, he found that more than half his accepted ideas had to be thrown away. Hasty amendments and admissions were needful all the time — explanations that he had never seen any necessity for until now. And so it was that this puppet, animated by his own ventriloquism, became a revealer of the hard truth of things.

When this hour was over he stared aghast at the decisiveness of its results. Unavailing he took refuge in anger, expending his last energies in an exasperated attack upon Srilata herself. Who was she, after all, that he should defer to her judgment? That desiccated impartiality of hers that awarded to generosity and calculation, to pleasure and self-discipline, to quixotism and expediency, each cynically their due — how was anything valuable to emerge from it? With all the antagonistic elements in equipoise why should the scales tip in favour of this or that? And yet they did — quite definitely, and a conclusion was registered that he could not disregard. It bore the stamp — not of morality, nor of common sense, nor of expediency, nor of good taste, alone; but of an authority compounded of them all. 'I will pay Srilata the visit she suggests,' he said to himself. 'But we shall not find it necessary to talk very long about my private affairs.' And so it turned out; for a few minutes only Lalita came under discussion; there was a slight pause, and then the talk passed on.

Not many days later Hari found himself upon his way to what was actually to be the last meeting. Completely worn out in heart and brain he dragged himself dully along. The little house, crouching under its thick cover of trees, seemed to look out at him slyly as he approached it; the room that had been the shelter of his secret intimacy wore a blank face, had a blank silence, that seemed to convey a sneer. A kind of shame mixed with a kind of self-scorn kept him standing there, in the middle of the floor, to survey this and that familiar object with an expression of distaste. At last, however, he sat down and with fixed gaze simply waited.

Lalita's countenance, when she came in, gave him a reflection of his own inward state. The smile she summoned quickly flickered out, and in his arms she held herself stiff and cold, her sad eyes staring widely before her. Yes, her capacity for feeling had run out just like his; so here they stood in the end, without spirit, in the clutches of an unhappiness that had stripped even itself of grace.

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He said: 'I came prepared, as you know. . . . But is this actually our last meeting?'

Mutely she inclined her head.

'You say it must be?'

'Yes, it must — it must.'

A wave of bitterness passed over him. 'All the same you will find — when I have gone out of your life . . .'

He could not finish. Her face had quivered into an expression of unhappiness that he could not bear. In silence they drew apart and seated themselves upon the divan; in silence they stared at the truth. What they were submitting to was the inadequacy of their love — that wretched love, which, nevertheless, had such power to torment them. In the face of this spiritual impotence nothing remained to be said — nothing true, at any rate, that was worth saying and nothing worth saying that was true.

'I suppose,' he said, 'I suppose we shall both get over this more quickly than we think.' And when she gave no sign of having heard him he went on: 'You will have plenty to distract you at all events. And then this charming marriage. . . . I hear that your mother is giving a reception for the Prince to-night.'

'No. To-morrow night.'

'To-morrow? No matter. To-morrow . . . and then the next day . . . there will always be something. We won't think about each other more than we can help.'

Again he lost himself in his misery. But his eyes fastened upon the sunlight outside. In the freedom of the sky, with the rush of the wind behind them, clouds were flying. Only Lalita and he were imprisoned in misery; shut up in the circle of their insistent memories and the craving of the heart.

All at once her hand shot out, sought his and closed upon it. He returned the pressure of her fingers for one moment and then rose to his feet. The quicker this was all over the better. But he wanted to find something deeply felt first — a word to remember having spoken. Standing a little way back he regarded her intently. With perversity he sought to extract from these instants the full measure of their pain; he revived his most blissful memories; he jeered at himself over his loss.

'Come!' he said at last, and invited her to rise.

She paid no attention to his outstretched hand; she sat looking straight before her.

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'I love you,' she said in a low voice, 'and I am terribly unhappy.'

He began a gesture and then checked it.

'Come!' he said again.

She rose and together they left the house. After locking the door behind them; he walked by her side along the narrow path. A few moments brought them within sight of the groom who was holding her horse.

He said: 'I think we had better not write.'

She winced. 'You think not?'

'If we are never to see one another again. . . .'

'We might write just once,' she murmured.

After a moment's thought he nodded. Yes; they might write just once — to amend this parting.

The groom was now quite near and their steps, which had retarded, stopped at last completely. 'Good-bye, Lalita,' he said very low.

She looked at him, caught at her breath, and then turned and ran to her mount. On his side he walked rapidly away.

ALL these weeks Amar had been working diligently in the pursuit of his various ends, and by no means without success. He had settled some troublesome question here, safeguarded his rights here; and now his little principality, he could say, stood as firm and sound outside and in as it was possible to make it. None of this, however, had been accomplished without effort, and it had been brought home to him afresh that he and Akbar were not made to understand one another. Had he been more fortunate in this respect he might have effected in half an hour what had actually cost him many weeks of difficult indirect negotiation. Altogether, he was not sorry that this season was drawing to a close; he had found Imperial court functions excessively tedious; and the tone of the society at Fatehpur-Sikri was—just as he knew it would be—much less agreeable than that of his own little court. He had been prepared for a good deal of ostentation and even a certain grossness; but it was not the prevailing lack of taste that had displeased him most. Far worse was the atmosphere, heavy and thunderous with intrigue.

At the forefront of his mind during the whole period there stood, naturally, the question of his retirement from the world, and this preoccupation enclosed him in a secret cell from which he watched, with gathering disquietude, the increasing pressure of rivalry between the two great factions in the Empire. There was a party which, whilst remaining loyal to Akbar, cherished the hope that the Emperor would make concessions to Salim and name him as his successor to the Throne. The other party fastened its ambitions upon Prince Daniyal; it was to this party that Ambissa belonged; and from the first she had strongly, if rather mysteriously, urged her brother to attach himself to it. This, however, the Rajah was not entirely prepared to do. So closely had Daniyal managed to seclude himself within the circle of his own particular friends, so adroitly had he avoided the ordinary run of court functions, that although it had been one of the Rajah's principal objects to make his acquaintance, he found his time at Agra drawing to a close without having done better than to catch sight of the Prince once or twice in the dim distance. Ambissa had promised more than once to bring about a meeting, but somehow nothing had come of it. On the other hand

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she missed no opportunity of assuring him that Daniyal was charming, that his faults were only those of youth, that he stood very high in his father's esteem, and that he would almost certainly be chosen for the Throne. Amar allowed these words no more than their proper weight; and when, after many weeks, he discovered by chance that Ambissa's acquaintance with Daniyal was of the slightest, he was more irritated than surprised. But, he reflected, her confidence in the young man's future must be strong indeed, if, instead of giving way to pique at her virtual exclusion from his circle, she still obstinately spoke well of him. The explanation probably was that, as a woman of principle, she felt obliged to entertain a high opinion of the man to whose party she was giving her allegiance.

At the moment that this last reflection was passing through his mind, the Rajah became aware of a certain moral discomfort. It sometimes happened thus. After criticizing Ambissa he would be stung by the query whether those same strictures would not, in some degree, apply to himself. Of course he did want to convince himself that Daniyal's was the right side to take, but that was very different from wanting to deceive oneself, surely? Right at the beginning he had admitted Gokal into his confidence and obtained from him the promise that he would watch over Jali during his minority and help Sita with advice; but he had not then been able to speak definitely about his policy. Animated by new scruples, he now went to Gokal again and exposed fully the trend of his recent activities. He supposed, he said, that Gokal would agree that the road he had been mapping out for Sita and Jali was, all things considered, the right one.

To his astonishment, Gokal demurred. And although, when pressed for his reasons, he lapsed into inarticulacy, Amar gathered that he had formed an unfavourable opinion of Daniyal's private character. But Gokal also protested that he knew very little about the Prince and advised Amar to seek information elsewhere. Upon this Amar bethought him of Srilata, and going to her house the next day he discovered, to his extreme surprise, that Daniyal was quite a friend of hers. This fact Ambissa — although she must certainly have known it — had not thought fit to communicate to him; and he began to think that a good deal of the time he had spent in listening to her had been wasted. Once again, however, he made the experience that Srilata's *milieu* was decidedly uncongenial. Her rooms were crowded with people whose appearance and manners

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he did not much care about, and the only person in the house that he knew was Mabun Das. After arranging to come again for a quiet talk the next day, he left precipitately but with the feeling that he would probably have done better to stay. There was no sense in holding oneself superior to Mabun Das, who was a man of ability and obviously destined to rise high in the world, and as for the empty-headed, affected youths who figured so largely among Srilata's guests, they were very likely members of Daniyal's set, whom it would have been worth his while to study a little, especially as it was too late now to get Srilata to arrange a meeting with Daniyal himself, for the Prince — she had just told him this — was on the point of leaving for the Hills.

The next afternoon, as he was being ushered out into the peach-garden at the back of Srilata's house, he heard a voice under the pagoda and recognized it as Hari's. It was a long time since he had come across his brother-in-law or even thought of him, although his mind had at first gone back occasionally to Hari's unaccountable behaviour six weeks ago; and once or twice he had gone so far as to wonder whether Hari might not have been actuated by some mad impulse to make advances to Sita. But that idea had never really formed itself fully, and after Ambissa's complaint of Hari's threat to divorce her it was completely extinguished. He had argued that if Hari were really anxious for a divorce, the reason must be that he wanted to marry again; and that in its turn could only mean that he was in love with some unmarried girl whose favours he could not obtain outside wedlock.

To find Hari here now did not suit him very well because he wanted to conduct his inquiries confidentially, and even, if possible, without making Srilata over-curious as to his reasons for taking so special an interest in the young Prince's character. The first words spoken, however, showed him that his arrival had not been so unhappily timed after all.

'Do come to my aid!' Srilata called out. 'Hari is taking me to task for being a friend of Prince Daniyal's.'

'Perhaps,' answered Amar, smiling, 'I, too, should be taking you to task, if I knew rather more about the Prince.'

Hari gave a short laugh. 'My impression,' said he rather dryly, 'has always been that you shared Srilata's partiality.' And then, turning to his hostess, he went on: 'Give him your latest piece of news; I shall be interested to see how he takes it.'



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His tone was rather surly and he was looking, Amar thought, decidedly out of sorts. The next moment, however, the Rajah's attention was entirely taken up by what Srilata was saying; she had heard that Prince Daniyal was about to make a public and spectacular declaration of his conversion to his august father's new religion.

This came as an unpleasant surprise, but instinctively, Amar dissimulated. 'Have you got that on really good authority? As you must know, people for some time have been speculating. . . .'

Srilata nodded to express her certainty and then went on to tell the following story: 'One evening, about a week ago, the Prince called at this house dressed in a wonderful flowing robe of white and silver with the words "Allahu Akbar" embroidered upon his breast. He paraded up and down the room in front of me with great delight — you know what a child he is in such matters — and when I complimented him, he told me that he had designed the costume himself. I then said — quite foolishly, I'm afraid — that I supposed it was intended for a fancy-dress ball. He laughed, and looking at me rather queerly, answered: "You are right; that's what it is — fancy dress!" And now — just think — I have heard that that marvellous robe is what he has designed for himself in the character of high priest in the Din Ilahi. Apparently he is to be raised to an important position in the new religious hierarchy almost at once.'

Srilata was laughing, and Amar pretended to take the matter in the same spirit, but, in reality, he was a good deal put out. He realized that the Prince's decision had great political significance, but even more important to him was the light shed upon the young man's character. The trouble lay here. It was not for himself that he was settling a future policy; it was for Sita. And that made a world of difference. For his part he found little difficulty in sifting out questions of personality from questions of policy, but Sita was otherwise constituted. And once one had recognized that, it became impossible, obviously, to commit her to an allegiance that would be offensive to her own personal standards.

After a little Hari got up and went away, and then Amar took the bull by the horns. 'Now listen, my dear Srilata, I am just at the end of my stay here and all my policy has been oriented in the direction of Daniyal. It has seemed fairly obvious to me that Daniyal was to be preferred to his brother, who is an ill-educated, drunken boor and a rebel to boot. It is true that I know Daniyal only by

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report; but report does not appear to have anything very serious against him. I understand that he is trivial-minded, an amateur of the Arts, and without much sense of the responsibilities of his position; but what is there in that? He appears to appreciate the worth of serious men such as Abu-l-Fazl, Man Singh, and Mobarek, and so long as these stand behind him and make up for his deficiencies, the Empire will not get out of gear. Well, I was saying this to Gokal the other day, when, to my surprise, he began to murmur and mutter against Daniyal. And when I pressed him for his objections he did nothing but continue his mutterings. All I could get out of him in the end was this: "Prince Daniyal is a leader of fashion".

With these last words Amar gave a little laugh, raised his eyebrows, and fixed his sister with a look of patient questioning. Srilata laughed, too, but on rather a dubious note, and as her answer did not come at once, he went on: 'Now, what is it that lies at the bottom of Gokal's prejudice? What inspires Hari, too, with such a decided antipathy? Surely you, my dear Srilata, who are by way of liking the Prince, can give me a little enlightenment?

'I have never said I *liked* him,' Srilata protested, after a moment's pause; 'but I admit, he amuses me.'

'Ah! he amuses you,' sighed Amar.

'Yes. Of course he is really trivial in character, as you say, but — well, there must be some frivolity in the world, my dear Amar! And then . . .'

She did not finish her sentence, and for a while Amar studied her in silence. She was thinking of him, he well knew, as a little cramped by prudishness. In his view, on the other hand, her placid overlooking of moral standards simply meant that her taste was one-sided, incomplete. Perhaps even she halted, with most of the world, at that stage where immorality still retains a certain glamour. Nor was she sophisticated enough to hold sophistication cheap.

'If Daniyal is merely trivial,' he said slowly, 'I don't see how he can be — even amusing.'

Srilata disliked argument. 'He has, at any rate, a light touch.' And her glance was faintly ironic.

'A light touch!' murmured Amar. 'He has a light touch. He is a leader of fashion. He is amusing.'

Over this he knit his brows with exaggerated concentration. 'Should I think him amusing?' he asked, with seeming innocence.

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'I don't think you would.'

'Perhaps not,' said Amar, still pondering. 'Perhaps merely foolish.'

He was hoping to prick Srilata into saying something more, but he failed; and in silence he reflected that her indications, as far as they went, were satisfactory. 'If Daniyal was a nonentity, he could proceed without scruple along the path that he had chosen. He would explain matters to Sita and she would rest content.

When he next looked up it was to meet Srilata's eyes. They were satirical; obviously she was being reticent. How irritating people sometimes were!

As if not unaware of his feelings she gave a little laugh of apology. 'You were talking of Gokal just now; surely one reason for his not liking Daniyal has suggested itself to you? Behind Daniyal there stands Mobarek, and Mobarek, as you know, is far from being a friend of Gokal's. Then, as for Hari's dislike of Daniyal, don't you remember that those two were sent off on a hunting expedition together three or four years ago? Well, I imagine that Hari might very easily have taken a dislike to the Prince then.'

This was all very reasonable, and Amar nodded his assent. Perhaps, after all, he was becoming fanciful about Daniyal. In any case, there was nothing more to be got out of Srilata; and yet, just before leaving the house, something impelled him to round upon her and say: 'Tell me this, what should I think of Daniyal, if I knew him as well as you?'

Srilata's face became thoughtful. 'He is not the kind of person you could approve of,' she said quietly.

So it was with this, which was just what he did not want to hear, that Amar finally took his leave.

ON the eve of their departure to the Hills Sita and Jali drove over to Gokal's pavilion to say good-bye. The sky was overcast, the afternoon warm and still. As they trotted along under the trees, a vague sadness oppressed them both; and Sita knew that her depression had very little to do with leaving Agra, but she was uncertain about Jali. Jali had developed a great affection for Gokal, who had been giving him the course of spiritual instruction proper to a boy emerging out of childhood. She reminded him that Gokal would be joining them shortly.

As soon as they reached the little wicket-gate Jali dived in among the trees. It was his habit now, outside the hours of his instruction, to wander away into the woods; and there he would remain hidden until they called to him that it was time to go back. So Sita went on alone up the little path by the lake side; and Gokal, who was sitting upon the terrace under a large umbrella, looked up from his book and saw her coming, and forthwith took his horn spectacles from off his nose and rose to meet her with a smile of pleasure. She was looking, he thought, more charming than ever, and this admiration was no doubt reflected in his smile. At any rate, Sita's heart warmed towards him and she returned his unspoken compliment with the laughing declaration that his figure, as he sat there on the terrace, had all the dignity and serenity of Buddha.

They had not been talking together for very long before she was tempted to introduce the subject of Hari. She and Hari had scarcely seen each other at all in the last weeks, his confidences had never been renewed, and so she was left with a good deal of unsatisfied curiosity. The question that kept cropping up in her mind was: 'Is he really in love? Is he capable of being really and truly in love?' But to ask Gokal for his opinion was not a thing that she could allow herself to do. Almost certainly it would not be possible for him to give an answer without falling into some breach of confidence. Moreover, there was another matter in her mind beside which all others sank into insignificance, and upon this other matter she was fully resolved to speak. For some time past something in Amar's manner had given her a suspicion that he might be contemplating retirement from the world. She had said nothing; she shrank from

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questioning him about it; it seemed to her that she hardly had the right to question; the first word ought to come from his side. But there was no reason why she should not sound Gokal; it would be easy for him to put her off should he wish to; he could say he knew nothing.

The conversation in the meantime had come round to the Din Ilahi, and Gokal's earlier cheerfulness was clouding over. Did she remember, he asked, that little old man with whom she had seen him talking not many days ago? Well, that was Shaik Mobarek, and Shaik Mobarek had visited him again only the other day in order to bring the news of Prince Daniyal's conversion. Furthermore, this meant that the Din Ilahi was to be publicly proclaimed.

In the pause that Gokal made here, Sita remained silent. She was trying to interpret his words in their full significance. She knew that those who adopted the Din Ilahi had to abjure their former faith and renounce their right of judgment on matters of belief, accepting the Emperor as sole and infallible interpreter of God's will upon earth. But Amar had also told her that in itself, and apart from this, the new religion contained nothing positively bad. It was a Theism broad and simple enough to include everything and signify nothing. Why, then, should Gokal, who was notoriously latitudinarian, take on quite so grave an air? She could not help suspecting that his main concern must be personal; he must be worrying about his own position and the dignities which self-respect might force him to renounce. She sympathized, but her sympathy was tinged with impatience, for she had always thought that Gokal valued the world too highly. She wouldn't call him a snob — oh no! he would never, for instance, sacrifice a friendship — but in his transactions with the world he must surely have made more than a few little sacrifices of self-esteem. How, otherwise, could he have attained to his actual position at Court? Not through intellectual eminence alone could any man, however highly gifted, hope to stand high in the world.

'Mobarek came to crow over me,' continued Gokal sadly. 'To him all this is a triumph, while in my eyes it is a disaster. I am convinced that Akbar is committing a terrible folly. And yet,' he went on after a silence, 'I abstain from condemning him. I know no standard by which such men can be properly judged. The ordinary canons do not apply to Men of Destiny. Such men may be speaking truly when they impute their actions to the decrees of fate. They feel themselves to be the vehicles of a purpose which they do not under-

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stand. This is their greatness, if it is also their limitation. In a sense they are puppets.'

'But Akbar is not merely a man of action,' objected Sita, 'he is a thinker, a philosopher, as well.'

Gokal gave a smile. 'Akbar is a mystic rather than a thinker. Mind you, I do not wish to suggest that mysticism and hard thinking are necessarily incompatible. Thought carried far enough passes beyond its own sphere, or rather becomes aware of its own limitations. It sees the human reason operating in the ocean of being as a special limited kind of activity. But Akbar's inner life is emotional rather than intellectual. He is no thinker.'

'At any rate,' answered Sita, 'he is a seeker after God. Who can doubt it after setting eyes upon the Gate of Victory at Fatehpur-Sikri and reading the inscription over the arch? "Said Jesus, on whom be peace: The world is a bridge. Pass over it, but build no house therein. Who hopes for an hour hopes for Eternity. Spend the hour in prayer. The rest is unknown"' There was a thrill in her voice as she spoke, and she added: 'Akbar is almost a Christian.'

Gokal's hand made a gesture in the air: he smiled and kept his peace.

For a space, during which their eyes rested upon the lake, there was no sound but the cooing of the pigeons in the trees. How lovely the water was with the shadows lengthening over it! Not a breath ruffled its surface; it reflected glassily the faint warm colours of the sultry sky. As her thoughts wandered, Sita's face became dreamy. It was a face, thought Gokal, the beauty of which deepened in tranquillity. It was like the lake. Even so did her beauty shine forth, self-subsistent, an answer that was yet no answer. . . . And he sighed.

'I want you to tell me something,' she said, turning towards him suddenly. 'For some time past — I really do not know how long — there has been a feeling in my heart that Amar . . .'

No reply came to fill her pause, but Gokal kept his eyes fixed upon her, and she saw them gradually deepen with a grave and speaking sympathy.

'Will it be soon?' she asked, her voice very low.

'Not too soon. . . . No, he will do everything rightly.'

So it had come at last! For thirteen years they had been married and it seemed to her now that this was what she had unconsciously begun to expect before half those years had gone by. She was not

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startled, only saddened. But resolutely she thrust her sadness aside; it was not that she wanted to think about.

'I understand. But it will be difficult for him to leave Jali and — and everything. . . . Yes,' she continued tonelessly and with far-gazing eyes, 'I understand, and yet it seems to me strange.'

'In our country, as you know, men often do this thing. At a certain age, after a man has discharged his duty as a husband, father, and citizen, he responds to another call.'

'You are a strange people. But perhaps I can understand.'

He sighed, partly from relief.

'And yet, how can God be served,' she went on suddenly, 'if not in this world — the world into which he has sent us?'

'The value of service,' returned Gokal gently, 'is recognized by Brahmin and Buddhist alike. The *Upanishad* says: "In darkness are they who worship only the world, but in greater darkness they who worship the infinite alone. He who accepts both saves himself from death by the knowledge of the former and attains immortality by the knowledge of the latter." Buddha, too, has said much the same thing. Where we differ from you is in our recognition of the value of holiness. In our minds the relation of man to man is secondary, right conduct following naturally when the relation of man to God is made perfect. Moreover, there is no greater benefit that a man can confer upon his fellows than the example of his own spiritual achievement. We have a saying: "The perfume of a flower travels before the wind, but the perfume of holiness travels even against the wind."'

'Amar has love in his heart,' continued Gokal, speaking low and urgently, 'but he believes that love should be indistinguishable from compassion, and that compassion should be exercised through the understanding rather than through the emotions. Love, therefore, should be a recognition of the unity of all consciousness, a comprehension of the goal of all consciousness, and a desire to assist all fellow-creatures towards that goal.'

'You can read many of my thoughts,' said Sita. 'Don't you then also know that I shall never be able to accept Amar's view of life?'

'I, myself, do not accept it,' answered Gokal after a moment's pause, 'neither do I reject it entirely. I think that you of the western world should consider carefully whether you have not made an error in idealizing the will to live. Life! The enrichment of life! The intensification of life! The prolongation of life into eternity!

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Does this obsession have any heartfelt meaning behind it? 'Do these notions contain a coherent ideal at their core? Buddhism says no! and waits in silence until the intoxication is over, until the commotion has died down.'

'So all the world is to turn Buddhist in the end?' And Sita shook her head. 'No, I, for my part, shall always affirm what Amar denies. Between us there is a gulf.'

Gokal leaned forward earnestly. 'The gulf lies not between those who affirm and those who deny, but between those who affirm and those who ignore. Listen!' he went on, 'I believe that between your affirmations and our denials there is, in reality, little more than a long difference of mental habit. Fundamentally your mind and Amar's are similar in type; you both raise the same problems and the answers you give are the same in essence, if their substance is not the same. You advocate life's intensification, Amar its extinguishment; but you both recognize imperfection and you both aim at perfection. Your goal is the same whatever names you give it.'

Sita was silent for a moment, then she stretched out her hand. 'Gokal, you are very kind to me. I shall turn to you in the days to come.'

After the sound of her voice had died away the stillness that fell seemed to hold a particular significance. They sat looking before them, looking at the sheet of luminous water that made a great emptiness at their feet. The dull reddish tints of the sky were reflected in it; the emptiness stretched beneath and above.

At last Gokal drew a long breath that was also a sigh. 'I hope I shall be wiser for you than I am for myself.'

These words were pronounced in a tone that seemed to mark them for his ear alone. It was in quite another voice that he presently resumed speech. He fell into a discourse on Akbar, on the Empire, on the eternal problems of life and religion. Listening, Sita felt that a little while ago she had done him an injustice. His grave voice carried her into new domains of thought. It was as if he had rapt her up on to some mountain height and were pointing with outstretched arm over unexplored regions of the world.



It was not until she reached the freshness of the foothills that Sita realized what a dust of weariness had settled down upon her spirit at Agra. Although it was against her intentions she had been drawn further and further into the vortex of festivities at Fatehpur-Sikri, and even her friendships in the Agra Palace had suffered from the rivalries and jealousies that emanated from the Imperial Court. It was depressing to look back on. So much time and energy devoted to formal pomposities or else expended upon small frivolities and trivial excitements into which one had to infuse a gaiety that did not naturally belong to them. However, she could now console herself with the thought that it was not altogether a mistake to give that way of living an occasional trial, for one returned with an even greater content to the pleasures that came to one by nature.

The country through which they were now passing did actually remind her of the Caucasus. Its torrents and flowery meadows, its heavy forests and cool, dewy nights — these brought back not only the memories, but the actual feelings that had been hers in early days. She thought of her parents and their friends, of all the old life that wars and disasters had broken up. It seemed very far away now; and yet that dimness and distance were still home. Memory revived made the civilization into which she had been transplanted seem outlandish again.

Jali was almost the age that she had been when her father had fled from the Caucasus; but how strangely different the type of childhood he presented! What would she have said in those days if he had been shown to her in a dream as the boy who was to be her own son? As she considered this, it struck her that he had changed a good deal during their stay at Agra, but she could not define exactly in what the change consisted. A great part of his aloofness and timidity had gone; he was more boyish now and carried himself with more spirit. But there was something, all the same, in these recent developments that she did not altogether like. 'People are changing little by little the whole time,' she thought, 'but one only notices it at a special moment by a special opening of the eyes.'

She was standing before the door of her tent as these reflections drifted through her mind. It was the seventh day of their journey,

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the plains already seemed to lie far beneath them, and suddenly, against the light of the setting sun, there hobbled up an old woman, hideously bowed and seamed and withered by her years. She held out a shaking hand and said: 'Great Lady, may many years and much love stand between you and me!' Sita made no reply, but called to her maid for money and held out some coins in a hand that trembled as much as the old crone's. Yes, the day would surely arrive when for her, too, weariness and bodily decrepitude would stretch a veil over the beauty of the world, making its songs and its flowers and its joys dim and remote. Nor was that all. She would feel that she no longer formed a part of the world's beauty herself. Nothing would be left then but a husk, a shell, a failing old woman, who had once been happy and young

With a mumbled blessing the old hag shuffled away, and Sita's eyes fell upon Jali, who, a little way off, was sitting cross-legged upon the ground. He sounded a few notes upon a *vina*, and presently, in the thin nasal tone of the people, struck up one of the common songs that he knew:

Dearest Lord, what art thou?  
Thou art the tiny bundle  
Which thine own  
Little mad woman  
Holds always to her heart. •

Little mad woman, I,  
And thou her precious bundle, her darling treasure,  
Of old torn rags.  
On these my head,  
When I am wearied by the dusty road,  
Rests and I sleep in peace.

Men in the streets point at me,  
Laugh at me,  
And throw dust.  
Some try to pluck thee from my heart;  
'Cast him away!' they cry.  
Rama! Rama! But how  
Could thy mad beggar-woman live without thee?  
Little mad woman without her lord, her love?

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No. I hurry past.  
Hugging thee to my breast,  
I go on alone,  
Smiling because this mad, mad heart of mine,  
Holding thee, holdeth love.

The tears sprang into Sita's eyes, and hiding her face from Jali, she turned and went into the tent. The setting sun sent a dusky glow through the canvas. In the red dusk of the tent she wept for loneliness, while the thin chant of compassionate indifference went on outside. Jali was his father's son; alien like his father; and she longed for her native land and for a people unlike these, whose very tenderness floated upon waters of resignation and sorrow.

Every day their march took them higher into the thin cool air of the hills. From their turning, twisting path they looked down over the heads of dark deodars and huge blossoming rhododendrons. In the early morning, when they made their start, the sun and the mist would still be competing, and then, for half an hour after the mist had vanished, a million dewdrops sparkled on the dark needles of every pine.

For many days after her arrival at Khanjo, Sita did little but wander in the woods, and she found herself taking a delight in them that at times was almost ecstatic. Her spirit melted into an exquisite closeness to the whole visible world; and the visible world she felt to be a garment of God. On coming home in the evening she would find Amar still dreamy from his meditations. In his mind the enjoyment of beauty was not an end in itself, nor even a means of approach to the ultimate goal. It took its place among the higher pleasures, but it was only subsidiary. The Path guided you away from the sensuous world altogether, away from yourself, away from the ardours of earth even at their keenest and purest. Her nature rebelled against this outlook and her companionship with Amar was spoilt by a sense of ceaseless, silent tension.

It was not very long before Gokal arrived, taking up his residence in a house on the other side of the little valley. He arrived in holiday mood, and this cheerful unconcern of his was so marked that one day she questioned Amar about it. How did he account for Gokal's high spirits, seeing that the political situation had certainly not taken any turn for the better and that he himself flippantly declared that his own personal prospects were past praying for? Amar's reply

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somewhat dismayed her, for she learnt that Gokal was now living in open concubinage with a low-caste girl of fifteen, whom he had brought up to the hills in his train. Such conduct in Gokal was astonishing, but she was perhaps less astonished by the action itself than by the change which it had wrought in his disposition. It seemed pitiful that the whole mental outlook of such a man should be dependent on so trivial a circumstance. After thinking for several moments she asked: 'What is the girl like?' And Amar replied that she was quite without character, intelligence, taste or moral sense. 'Then how lovely she must be!' thought Sita, and she sighed, for she was not unlike other women in her inability to decide whether the value which men set on mere beauty was a matter for laughter or tears. Be this as it might, Gokal's love affair seemed to be dreadfully lacking in the elements of poetry or romance; and yet, apparently, it sufficed to distract him, not only from his personal worries, but from all the higher preoccupations that had taken so important a place in his life. Weakness like this was lamentable. Intellectually men had a higher vocation than women. But how often men showed themselves inferior to women in their careless profanation of love. A woman saw the beauty of love and instinctively cherished it. A woman saw that in this confused, fragmentary world love was the only power that could fuse a life into a unity and endow it with form and significance. It was wrong of men to profane love in their thoughts and deeds, for all love was in its essence beautiful — even the most passionate earthly love.

A few weeks later, when Hari arrived, his temper presented a decided contrast to Gokal's, and Sita realized quickly enough what the nature of his trouble was. The last time she had seen him in Agra she had made a guess that his love affair must be turning out unhappily. His moodiness, his sombreness, now amply confirmed her suspicions and she said to herself with emphasis that he certainly deserved no better fortune. All the same, her memory of how he had taken her into his confidence soon injected a little sympathy into her ironical view of his plight. Besides, he did present in his gloom a figure of greater dignity, at any rate, than Gokal, whose complacency had become positively distasteful to her since she had discovered its cause. Thank goodness, Hari's love affair stood on a higher level than that! There was evidence in his present dejection, that he had at least put some genuine feeling into it. She could believe that it had been a romance and not a mere loveless gallantry.

NOTWITHSTANDING his absorption in his own private concerns Hari had found it impossible entirely to neglect everything outside; and, rather strangely, it turned out that at the very time when his love affair was ending its unhappy course, in the eye of the world he was achieving quite a success. First of all, having discovered why it was that he lay under the cloud of the Emperor's displeasure, he had applied himself to putting the matter to rights. The trouble was just what Ambissa had surmised; his visits to Mahomet Hakim Ali at Kabul had been reported at certain high quarters; and when, a little later, it was discovered that he had left Kabul in disguise, suspicion arose that he might be bound for Allahabad with treasonable messages for Prince Salim. The Emperor's secret police had, accordingly, made efforts to trace him. For two months Mabun Das had been searching all in vain, and then, lo and behold! he had turned up on the terrace of the palace at Agra.

Wisely, Hari had lost no time in having an explanation with Mabun Das. There was just enough truth in the suspicion that he was a sympathizer of Salim's to make him anxious to dispel that idea. His story to Mabun was that he had been hunting wild goat in the mountains, and, as far as he could judge, Mabun believed him. Then, some weeks later, he had had a long private audience with Akbar and had succeeded so well in dispelling the last vestiges of the Emperor's ill humour that he received, the next day, the gift of an embroidered tunic and jewelled dagger. After this his return into favour had proceeded with a rapidity that had created considerable astonishment. The professional courtiers were not very well pleased; but the jealousy he aroused did not go deep, as it was easy to see that he was not an ambitious-minded competitor.

After his parting with Lalita he had no other wish than to obtain a complete change of scene, and he would certainly have indulged this longing, had not his engagements at court been absolutely binding. As it was, he went to the opposite extreme and threw himself into the thick of social activities. There were days when this regime was moderately successful, but efforts made so unspontaneously soon led to exhaustion, and then he would sink back into an even blacker gloom. Whenever he allowed his memories free play, the

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pain became agonizing. The contrast between his past happiness and his present misery overwhelmed him. How rich and warm and full life had seemed whilst he was in the summer of his love! Now, how completely he was wintered!

He had lost no time in writing to Lalita, because his one idea now was to put the past out of mind. Her reply awakened but little emotion. He read it with a frown, tore it up into fragments and threw them away. He had feared remorse, but this — the most incalculable of emotions — was spared him. He felt none, not even when he got a second letter in which she said: 'How long will this misery continue? I don't see how I shall ever manage to live without you. Time seems to do no good.'

And yet her pain, he knew, was real enough. He no longer argued that had her love been stronger it would have swept aside the obstacles in its way. No; he accepted the fact that love renounced has a pain that cannot be measured by the motives of the renunciation; and yet he regarded both his sufferings and hers with a certain measure of contempt. She would get over her grief because she was young, and he because he was middle-aged.

Great was his relief when at length he was able to leave Agra, and on his journey up to the Hills there were days when he fostered the illusion that he was cured. Then, very gingerly, he would begin fingering his wounds. He would let Lalita's image float before his eyes just to see whether the old pain had really been stifled to death. Sometimes the stab and sting did not return; and then his heart leapt up at this confirmation of his hope. But an hour later perhaps his eye would fall upon some girl who had a turn of figure, or a gesture, or a look, that resembled Lalita's, and then the sun would darken and the icy chill of bereavement would re-envelop him. Then he felt his spirit shrivel again. All in a moment he became old and weak and sick. When these accesses came upon him he had to rush away into solitude, and later, when the pain had spent itself, he was exhausted and without the wish to live.

In these hours of misery he could not look for consolation from Gokal, for Gokal was in a frame of mind that put him entirely out of sympathy with troubles such as this. Moreover, he could not let his thoughts dwell upon Gokal's position without suffering from self-reproach. It was not until he arrived at Khanjo that he became aware that Gokal had committed the dreadful imprudence of bringing Gunevati with him, and he now saw that, having long ago

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received some indication of what was afoot, he might well have attempted, before it was too late, to dissuade his friend from slipping into an entanglement that was set about with fearful risks. Having noticed that Gokal's innocent affection for Vasumati was in danger of transferring itself to her sister, why had he not foreseen all the rest? Although it was true that Brahminical discipline had relaxed under the influence of Mongol rule, commerce between a Brahmin and a girl in the position of Gunevati was, by all current notions, an offence of unthinkable heinousness.

Gokal was relying, as he now explained, upon the remoteness and seclusion of the spot. He argued that if ever a rumour should escape into the outer world, time and distance would so greatly have weakened it that his bare denials would suffice. But Hari shook his head over this; everything, in the last resort, would depend upon Akbar, and Akbar was no longer to be counted on.

The Emperor was becoming more and more deeply committed to his new religion; he could not allow it to be a failure without great loss of prestige. His endeavours were now directed on obtaining the support of the Brahmins, and many were yielding to threats, cajolery, and bribes. Gokal had not yet been approached, but it was beyond doubt that the day of his trial would come. If his position had been insecure even before, what did it look like now?

It was curious to observe with what equanimity Gokal was flying in the face of the worst dangers. Moreover, in thus indulging himself in all the pleasures that he had hitherto so rigorously eschewed, he seemed even to be finding a certain spiritual satisfaction. There was more than a little humour and self-directed malice in the commentaries that he passed upon himself and his infatuation. 'My dear Hari', he would say, 'my alliance with Gunevati, so far from being incongruous, as Amar seems to think, is the most natural and fitting conjunction in the world. In me you find the intellectual weary of his brain-spun cobwebs; in Gunevati the child of nature, a proper toy for a second childhood such as mine. The society of Gunevati is a perpetual refreshment to me. Before meeting her I had no idea how far I had travelled from the simple, the elementary. Sometimes, before making some remark to her, I try to forecast what her response will be, but, when it comes, its glorious and unimaginable crudity **never** fails to give me a delicious shock. How uninteresting is the educated mind in comparison with hers! Thought crystallizes into patterns of a merely formal complexity; but the instincts, with all the

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richness of their irrationality, belong to the creative side of life. Animal instinct, embroidered over with the arabesques of the imagination, how can you better me that? I am tired not only of second-rate thinkers, but even of the first-rate. How many there are who think only for the sake of thinking, and what dullards they make of themselves! I shall probably settle down in this spot with Gunevati for the rest of my days, and if I write a book it will be too true for men to understand.'

To all this Hari would reply with a laugh and a shrug. There was no use in giving warnings to a man in such a mood. But he prayed that Gokal would tire of Gunevati before she tired of him, for when that happened she would either poison him or run away.

In this quiet upland valley the days slipped by very uneventfully; there was not even much communication between Gokal's house and Amar's, although now and again of an evening Gokal and Hari would stroll over to sit upon Amar's veranda in the moonlight; and then long, desultory conversations would take place to the accompaniment of the hooting owls. Hari, as a rule, said very little, and when he did speak he was apt to be bitter and contentious.

'You talk of loyalty to Akbar,' he broke out on one occasion, 'but, I ask you, what reason has any one of us to be loyal? That man has robbed us of everything! Independence, initiative, responsibilities, all are gone! And now, it seems, freedom of thought is about to go too! Egoists like Akbar suck up all the virtue in the soil around them; even the lives of their friends are stunted and starved. I have always declared that we should be better off under Salim. He is something of a scoundrel no doubt, but anything is preferable to a full-blooded tyrant.'

No one replied to this tirade; but the next day he and Sita happened to be left alone together for a few moments. 'I was surprised,' she said, 'to hear you speak so bitterly about the Emperor, especially after his showing you so much goodwill.'

Hari gave a laugh, 'Akbar's goodwill is worth a tunic and a jewelled dagger — but no more.'

He was staring obstinately at the ground as he spoke, and Sita, after studying him for a moment, gave a sigh and went on: 'Surely there is nothing disgraceful in accepting the leadership of a man like Akbar? Independence bought from Salim would be less honourable.'

To this Hari made no reply, and the next moment the others



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returned. Altogether, during these days, Hari showed himself off in a decidedly unbecoming light; but his surliness did him no harm with Sita, for she had her own interpretation of it. Indeed, it rather stimulated her sympathies, making her feel at times that Amar as well as Gokal were both living too contentedly inside the closed circle of their preoccupations. Gokal's interest was of the senses, Amar's of the mind; but there was nothing that either of them wished to give to the world at large — or to receive from it. Day by day it was being borne in upon her that nothing she could say would move Amar by one hairbreadth, or put off by one single moment the execution of his resolve. In the depths of her heart she found no condemnation of him, nor even reproach, but superficially she often felt aggrieved. Then, too, there was always some sadness for her in the thought that the goal towards which his face was turned lay so remote from hers. His projected separation from her in this world pained her perhaps not more than his refusal to hope for their reunion in another world. It argued, if not a weakness in his love, a complete absence of faith in the determining power of love.

Gokal's description of the manner in which she had accepted the news of his resolve had filled Amar with admiration and gratitude and he had done what he could to show her what his feelings were. They did not really misunderstand one another; it was not his fault nor hers that a rift opened between them. The rift was narrow as yet; there were still moments when they could walk along side by side and pretend that it was not there. Nevertheless, it went deep, so deep that they now preferred not even to think about it. They felt a constraint in each other's company and the surface of their intercourse was ruffled by many flaws.

All this time Sita was keeping Hari under distant but keen observation; and one day she said: 'Hari appears to be recovering from his infatuation. I dare say his unhappiness has been a blessing; in the end, perhaps, his thoughts will turn to God.'

Amar smiled rather sceptically before replying, but all he returned was: 'For the whole of his life he has been restless and dissatisfied. I take that as a sign that he is possessed by a longing for the Truth.'

Whereupon Sita impulsively exclaimed: 'Yes, like Akbar, he might well say: "It is Thee I seek from temple to temple."' '

'Unfortunately,' rejoined Amar, 'he has sometimes wearied of temples and sought consolation in the harems of his acquaintances instead.'

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As a matter of fact, Sita's conjectures about Hari were a little premature. His feelings were still embittered and all the world was his enemy. On the other hand, the solitude that he had sought at first was ceasing to be agreeable to him; hours came when he had a longing for human companionship.

From Gokal's garden one could look down through the trees on to a little lawn on the other side of the stream. Here Sita used often to spend an hour with her book, and there were times when the gleam of her dress would fasten insistently upon his attention. It took him several days to make up his mind, but one fine morning he jumped up, resolved at last to join her. After all, nothing peculiar could be found in such a proceeding; and if his presence was unwelcome he would surely manage to detect it.

His path down the slope passed under tall rhododendrons that shut out all the view and, three minutes later, when he came to the moss-grown bridge over the stream, he was disappointed at finding that Sita was no longer there. He went across, however, and sat himself down and began reading a little volume of Persian verse which he found lying upon the grass. He was still reading when Sita reappeared. She looked surprised, but her smile was not unwelcoming, and presently they were discussing the Persian poets together.

When that topic came to an end there was a pause, but the murmur of the stream below and the rustle of the trees overhead gave the silence a peaceful quality. Then she picked up the book and fell to reading her favourite passages aloud, while Hari, outstretched on the warm turf, listened at first absent-mindedly, but later with deep pleasure. After this there came another and a longer silence, and then suddenly he said:

'I wish you could teach me to feel as you do.'

'How do I feel!' she asked, surprised.

'I imagine that you feel all the time as though you were living in a fairy tale.'

'That's strange!' She looked up at the sky. 'You're right. I've always felt that I was part of a fairy tale.'

He gave a short laugh. 'You haven't changed much, then, since you were a child.'

'I've certainly never wanted to,' she replied rather hesitatingly. 'But one does change.' And she sighed.

He raised his head to look at her. 'I don't think *you* have — not much. Neither outwardly nor inwardly.'

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'Why do you speak in that bitter tone?' she asked.

'Because I am bitter.'

She didn't want to ask him why, so all she said was: 'I'm sorry'.

For the first time that day embarrassment threatened to fall upon them. He lay staring down into the miniature forest of grass; her pensive eyes rested upon his bare head. The shape of it was pleasant to her, and she said at last: 'I have my moods, too. I feel sometimes that a comet coming to destroy the earth would be a kindly thing; that life is neither tragedy nor comedy, but only a farce — so confused, so self-contradictory, so transient are we. But I don't stay in that mood for long.'

'Just now,' she went on after a pause, 'I feel rather empty of thought. I don't know why — I am content to sit here every day doing nothing.'

'You have that book of poetry,' he observed.

'Yes. But I haven't been reading it much. I listen to that stream which reminds me of a stream at home.'

Hari made no reply; he abstained even from looking at her. She certainly was a charming creature, and he waited, smiling, for her to go on. But the silence continued, so presently he said:

'You seem to inhabit a world of your own vision and making. Don't you sometimes find the prosaic worlds of other people imposing themselves upon you?'

'I did at Agra; but I don't here, and I don't at home. For my friends I can always find a place in my own world — the world which I believe in — the world which you think childish.'

'No,' he returned wearily, 'not childish, only — unreal.'

'Why unreal? Look at that butterfly over there.' And her eyes wandered around her. 'Why unreal? My world takes in everything I see here; this forest and all the life inside it. Isn't this forest as real as Fatehpur-Sikri?'

She broke off, and while she was looking away, he took the opportunity of studying her. Her small head, the lines of her chin and neck — they were enchanting. She certainly was a most flower-like being. She made him think of a flower nodding and swaying in a summer breeze, and yet that pose of hers was erect, it was almost imperious in its erectness.

'You are right, no doubt,' said he at last, 'and I am wrong. But I was born wrong.'

'I'm sorry you are depressed,' she returned, in her rather drawling,

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rather expressionless voice. 'You feel, I suppose, that there is no mystery left in anything, that all feeling is stale, that life is an open book which you have read over and over again. And you think that your mood is permanent. Suffering always has, as Feizi says, the nature of infinity.'

Very soon after this she got up and wandered away in the direction of the house. Hari did not offer to accompany her, but seated himself upon the ground again; and while he listened to the liquid sounds of the stream and dry rustle of the breeze, the memory of her parting smile lingered pleasantly in his mind. A peace that he had not felt for many months descended upon him, and the scene before his eyes did more than merely soothe. It instilled into him the conviction that it possessed a value of its own, and in its value, thus deeply felt, there dwelt a power of comfort. For its value was secure and enduring, whilst the value of his own personal happiness — well, that was small at the best. How fortunate, then, that it was open to a man to rejoice in what lay outside himself.

For an hour or more he stayed there; but when he began to reflect upon the problem of conduct he was thrown into perplexity again. What guidance did such feelings and intuitions afford? In what direction did they point? He pondered, but to this question nature made no reply.

By some unaccountable turn Hari's spirits the next day were lower than before. It was not so much that his heart ached for Lalita as that his whole being, he felt, was accursed. With appalling clearness he saw a dreadful truth: in addition to the will to live a man needs must have the power to enjoy life. Of these two gifts the second seemed to him the more mysterious, and his loss of it filled him with dismay. Thinking of Sita, he determined to make her bear the brunt of his depression. Her happiness worked upon him like a challenge, calling him to put it to the proof. From the earliest dawn he strove to give shape to the formless pessimism within him, hunting for ideas that would embody it, for words that would drive it sharply into her understanding. Yes, he meant to carry war into her country. Religion, he would say, was nothing more than a refuge — even for those who were not conscious that they stood in need of one. He would tell her that neither courage, nor force of intellect, nor any nameable gift or virtue could be accounted a guarantee against self-deception. Nor could the seeker after truth make any appeal to the authority of wisdom or goodness, for the sceptic of mean character and mean intelligence might — in spite of his meanness or even by virtue of his meanness — interpret the universe more truly than the sage or the saint. There was no evidence that wisdom and goodness had a universal instead of a merely terrestrial significance, and to be satisfied with the latter humanity must be smug, indeed, in its own invented virtue. The plain man had a plain need for some sort of religion, if only as an excuse for behaving decently; as a reason to give himself, for instance, for not breaking the head of the prig, who got on very well (or so at least he would flatter himself) by the light of his own sweet nature. To sum up, a religion was what every honest man wanted and could not, for his very honesty, find.

Sita, of course, was a Christian; she retained very elementary ideas — ideas that had all the charm and naivety of the nursery clinging to them. There was a kind Father in Heaven whose function it was to deal out justice tempered with mercy. There was a system of rewards and punishments, everything, in fact after the pattern of an earthly schoolroom.

Well prepared was Hari at the time of his setting out; but, again,

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when he got to the little lawn, it was to find no one there. The morning, however, was still young, so he decided to sit down and wait. This time the air was still, the sky pale, but without a cloud; a scent arose from the warm pine needles, and now and then he would catch a breath of fragrance from the moon-flowers in the long grass behind. Those silvery blooms were already wide open and although they faded in the course of a single day there were always others to take their place. Hosts of butterflies hovered over them and when he became tired of watching these a family of water-rats popped out upon the bank. So amusing was the play of the young ones that, for several minutes after Sita had appeared, he and she remained hushed, intent upon not disturbing the game.

This over, it took him a little time to get back into the right vein, but he succeeded in the end and came out with most of his pre-arranged say. Nor was it ineffective. He had the satisfaction of seeing a troubled look spread over Sita's face. 'So what I say is this,' he concluded, driving his last points home: 'Your faith, like your happiness, is simply the expression of a temperament. My temperament is, unfortunately, not hospitable to the delusions of religion. But until quite lately I did manage to bring a certain zest to the business of living. I must recover that zest or give up the game.'

'I don't think your zest actually made you very happy,' replied Sita distressfully.

'It was better than nothing,' said Hari.

'But it had no stability — as you discovered to your cost. Your business now, surely, is to look, not for happiness, but for something deeper out of which happiness will spring.'

Hari gave a shrug. 'Christianity, I suppose!'

Looking into the distance Sita smiled to herself. 'You might do worse.'

'I am very well aware that I could not possibly do better,' returned Hari. '*Your* Christianity, at any rate, is charming.'

'Only you are not, like me, still in the nursery!'

Hari raised himself upon one elbow to contemplate her. Really, it was impossible, whilst lying upon this sweet-smelling grass and talking to someone as pretty as she, to do justice to the blackness of the universe or one's own innermost gloom. But he was not alone in his failure to carry out his full intentions. Sita was missing her aim too. She couldn't find the moment for producing all the serious and compelling things that she had come prepared with. Perhaps homilies

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would flow from her lips more naturally some other day. At any rate, on this particular morning, the conversation, initiated with solemnity, took its own wilful course, grew lighter and lighter, and no attempt was made to alter it.

The next day, too, much the same thing happened, and the next. So, after a while, both she and Hari gave the matter up. The way in which they were passing their time seemed, after all, to be justified in its results. Hari found himself recovering his spirits, and Sita could give herself the credit of bringing this about. Had anyone suggested to them that this was the beginning of a gallantry, they both would have smilingly shaken their heads. It was only by slow degrees that Hari became aware that sentiment was colouring his relationship, and Sita, when this change was no longer to be ignored, slipped into the assumption that his feelings, whatever depths they might reach, would remain without danger for either of them.

Upon this pleasant footing their intimacy grew apace. Although Sita had no taste for vapid flirtation, life without romance was, to her thinking, hardly life at all. She accepted Hari's homage serenely; indeed, it was her very serenity that at last made him restive, so that one day he said: 'Are you never afraid of my getting to love you too well?'

She gave him a mocking glance. 'Can you pass from one love to another as quickly as that?'

'Perhaps!'

Again her glance flitted over him, but she also shook her head, and for the time the subject was not pursued. A few days later, however, when she was talking about her return home, the indifference with which she seemed to envisage their parting stung him once more into speech. 'You have grown so accustomed to my adoration,' he said, 'don't you think you may miss it a little when we part?'

Her answer was made quite lightly. 'My dear Hari, I shall miss you very much.'

'I was not suggesting that. I said you would miss being made love to.'

'Now why,' she questioned in a voice completely changed, 'why do you go out of your way . . . ?'

He shrugged. 'Let us look the truth in the face. I have been making love to you.'

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‘No, no!’ she cried.

They were standing beside the little bridge when this was said, for their hour had just run out. A few deep moments of indecision passed over them. They were looking at one another intently. And then Sita turned and took the path up to her house.

On his way home Hari stepped out with a vigour that corresponded to an unwanted stir within. ‘What do I mean by this?’ he questioned. ‘Am I behaving heedlessly? Do I run the risk of cheapening what would otherwise . . . ?’ As his troubled memory touched here and there upon the hours they had shared together, one scene in particular reached forward reproachfully into the present. They were wandering along by the stream and the air was full of white mist that curled up from the wet ground. Every leaf, every twig, every blade, had a bead of water hanging on it; and things close at hand seemed particularly vivid because everything beyond was blotted out by the soft whiteness. They had stopped before a little bank that was crowded with wild flowers. Each flower looked up at them with a colour and outline so definite that they felt as if they were children looking at flowers for the first time. How sharp was the sensation — now revived — of standing there, on that little island in the mist, in the presence — so intense — of those archetypal flowers! Was he unregardful of the value of shared moments such as those? Unmindful of their beauty — or of the fineness of restraint? No, no; he must tell her quickly that it was not so.

And yet, although these intentions held, at their next meeting when he tried to carry them out, he was completely baffled, and not a thing took place in the way he had arranged. They came together, he and she, in all the tension of long and anxious heart-searchings — a tension cloaked under a delusive calm. And then, before they knew it, the words they were exchanging were full of a deep agitation; the event carried them away on its own rush; and what he finally said to her was: ‘You have known for some time that I love you. Nevertheless, everything shall be as you wish. Only tell me what you do wish! Tell me how much I may love you; and I will try. . . .’

She clasped her hands together in the extremity of her disquiet. ‘You must love me only as you love those flowers, or as a child,’ she said, ‘or as a creature of your own imagination; but not — not as a woman, not as a person belonging to the real world.’

After this everything went on — or seemed to go on — as before.



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Sita was apparently determined not to acknowledge any change, and Hari lent himself to the pretence. Nevertheless, his words had recoiled upon him. The question how much their dalliance meant could be ignored (he now felt it all the time) only as long as it had been left unasked. Their loves, while content in the Eden that she had created for them, had been innocent and safe. Why, then, had he stirred up temptation? And why now, just because she showed herself willing to continue on the same footing as before — why was he perpetually haunted by a little laugh of cynical amusement which seemed to be ringing in the air? Why, in spite of his contrition, did he still feel himself spurred on, instigated, assured by some demon within, that he was now free to make love to her with far greater directness than before?

He resisted the enticement; but a good deal of the pleasure that he had formerly taken in her company was lost in the struggle and constraint. Nor was he able any longer to be forgetful of the figure of Amar. Before many days had passed he was saying to himself with groans that there was nothing for it but to go away. He had taken his lesson recently enough; and this time — no, no! there should be no indecision.

A few days more and chance threw him a suggestion which he caught at with a miserable alacrity. He happened to be in the house when an urgent summons came for Amar, whose parents, an aged couple, were spending the hot season on a little country estate of theirs three days' journey westward along the hills. Amar's mother had been taken ill; Amar announced that he would set out the next morning at daybreak; and Hari, giving himself no time for second thoughts, at once made the offer to accompany him.

It was raining, but not hard. A thin, fine moisture drifted through the trees, the clouds were lying low upon the hills. All night it had rained; the hoofs of the horses sank noiselessly into the sodden leaves, and the heavy boughs above sagged as though from a weight of despondent thought. To Hari, riding along in silence, Nature herself seemed to have veiled her head in melancholy; but he was not insensible to the beauty of this her mourning aspect. There was grandeur in the valley depths lost in a clinging mist and in the darkly-wooded mountain-flanks going up into cloud.

With thoughts of Sita pressing incessantly upon his mind, he strove hard to convince himself that she would understand and approve his going away. The worst part of it was that moments came when he himself lost all sense of the rightness of the impulse under which he had acted, and then too he had transports of angry rebelliousness, when he was conscious only of having given his heart a sudden and very painful wrench. Some of his anger visited itself upon Amar, who, going along in front, tall, straight-backed, but with chin sunk upon his breast, presented a figure of the most profound contemplation. It was impossible to believe that his inward serenity was not flawless. But had any man the right to be so unaware of the feelings of those near him? How much thought had he bestowed upon Sita during these last weeks? Was she not, after all, a woman — and his wife? And could a man withdraw himself from everyday life without suffering the loss of his earthly rights? ‘You,’ cried Hari in his heart, ‘you, who stand in my path, are not a man of flesh and blood but an abstraction. That is what your lofty ideals have made of you. The virtuous man is separated from the rest of mankind by the pedestal of his own virtue; he becomes a stumbling-block — or a figure of absurdity. However,’ he went on to himself, ‘I do not condemn Amar’s wish to retire from the world, for even if he were to remain in it in order to serve, he would still be far estranged from the human. But then again: how can a man, enclosing himself in the solitude of his own self-conscious will, win freedom from the differentiation of personality? Yet that, precisely, is what Amar is aiming at. Is he not following a road that will carry him farther and farther into the inward maze and tighten the knot of selfhood? And

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I? Why am I following him?' Once more he lost himself, and then his thoughts came out into the light again: 'What I behold as weak and incomplete in myself, what I am now inclined to flee from as from a painful disturbance, or as a sin — can that not be interpreted in a dual way corresponding to its own ambiguous nature? Why is life regarded as either a heaven or a hell? Certainly not because it stands midway between. No, life is both the height and the depth; and filth and cruelty are also joy and strength.'

The ride went on, and always in the same unbroken silence. The trees under which they were now passing were taller and also more widely spaced. After a while Hari spurred his horse forward and rode along by Amar's side; but the latter, still deep in meditation, gave no sign of noticing his presence. Hari studied him with sidelong glances, his face wearing a faint smile; and presently, in a voice devoid of all expression, he inquired of Amar whether his religious exercises had been progressing favourably; was he yet within sight of his goal? To bring his mind down to earth cost Amar, clearly, some effort; before replying he fastened upon Hari eyes that were still focused upon thoughts lying far beyond. His answer, however, when it came, was definite enough and delivered with perfect simplicity. Moreover, having once begun to speak, he went on with a freedom from reserve for which Hari was unprepared. Without doubt it was the forest and the grandeur of the forest that wrought upon him. Thoughts that could not have been expressed without a kind of spiritual impropriety in the noise and bustle of the world rose naturally to the lips in a place such as this. Gravely he explained that he had reached a stage on life's journey when worldly things could interest him no longer. But, far from sinking into any tranquillity of indifference, he had been overtaken by a terrible sense of urgency. One half of his life had passed already, and how little he had lessened his distance from his goal! His recent practices in meditation had not been discouraging, but they had shown him that the time for casting off all mundane attachments had arrived. It was necessary that he should enter a monastery.

His gaze had been going straight out before him as he spoke; and Hari, who was looking into his face with concentration, now gave a sudden frown and turned away. As they advanced at a walk under the hush of the wet, windless trees, his thoughts rushed into the distant future. He saw Amar as an old man, sitting under the palm trees of a monastery garden in Ceylon. He saw him in saffron robes,

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with lined face and shaven head. And then, the next instant, he was seized with an intense awareness of the actual present — the fresh damp scent of this Himalayan wilderness, and the austere presence of the solitary human being at his side. Then again, all at once he travelled in imagination back to the house where Sita, standing by the window with vacant eyes, was pursuing a vision of two travellers upon their way. Into her personality he projected himself with an effect that was like walking into the sunlight out of a sepulchre; and upon his thought of her he lingered until it came to him with a start that he had not yet spoken a word in response to his companion.

‘And Sita?’ he questioned briefly.

The expression that gathered upon Amar’s face was not easily to be interpreted, but there was nothing evasive in his reply. Hari was shown that carefully, conscientiously, everything had been thought out, and every provision made. As he listened, the shadow over his face deepened. Here was a remarkable lesson in the art for which he himself was so signally inapt. He was shown how the wayward vine of this our earthly life could be gently, cunningly, bent to the framework of circumstance, and the spirit, thus acquitted of its mundane charge, be allowed the freedom to soar.

As he considered Amar, envy, admiration, scorn, and curiosity competed in his breast. Currents of sympathy and hostility pulsed through him, quickening the beat of his heart. All at once, and before he rightly knew what he was about, he drew up, and grasping the reins of Amar’s horse, brought it to a standstill with his own. Leaning forward in the saddle, he plunged his gaze deep into Amar’s eyes, and thus, for at least a minute, held him under a fixed and stern regard. Then, by a curious transformation, that lowering look turned into a smile. The smile said nothing, or rather defied Amar to find a meaning for it.

To this strange piece of behaviour the Rajah submitted without any loss of calm. There was no change in his composure; Hari’s aggressiveness, if such it was, missed its stroke; his challenge, if it was one, fell to the ground. After another moment he withdrew his hand, and with that the two horses went forward and the ride continued as before.

For the rest of that day, and for the better part of the next, their way lay deep through the same tall ranks of dark-hued, windless trees. The forest was grand and still; not even a bird’s note sounded; only at times the sun, breaking through the clouds, shone mistily

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overhead. For Hari the monotonous hours passed as in a dream. The activities of the world, made to appear at once turbulent and trivial, seemed to be receding beyond hail of memory itself. Like the crash and roar of the waves, as one journeys inland from the sea, they were growing faint, they were now completely unheard. To this sense of isolation he submitted himself; nor was he ungrateful for the numbness that crept over him.

In the afternoon of the second day their ride took them out from under the trees and along the edge of a grassy plateau high up above the great plain. Distance obscured all detail; the eye swept across a limitless expanse over which hung a ceiling of grey cloud. Here and there a bank of storm-rain drifted slowly along, filling the space between earth and sky with a dull purple blur. Even at this elevation the air was hot, damp, and lifeless; the horses moved sluggishly and their riders had no energy to press them on. Hari's thoughts went back to a recluse, beneath whose cave-dwelling they had passed only a few hours ago. Whilst the multitude of human beings swarming invisibly upon the plain offered him, in their close, common life, the likeness of a mildew upon the face of the earth, that hermit stood forth, in his imagination, as a separate and self-subsistent unit. He stood forth, as Hari was pleased to picture him, as an independent centre of spiritual life; and that, no doubt, was because he had taken to himself the space for a true individuality to move in. Yet that same principle of individuality was, in Amar's view, delusive; pain and evil were inherent in it, and thus one arrived at the kernel of Buddha's doctrine: wisdom and self-knowledge and self-extinction were one. More than once during that day did Hari feel inclined to retrace his steps to the cave and petition to be received as a disciple. But he had been told that the hermit was a Sakti; and that branch of Hinduism was not the one to which he now inclined. Hinduism in general, however, appealed to him as the broadest and most elastic of all religious systems. He was attracted by its independence of dogma, the smallness of its demands upon blind faith. But these attractions also constituted its weakness, lending point to the criticism made by Amar that Hinduism was not a religion but simply religiousness itself. Upon the spiritual substance it imposed no form, to the urge it gave no certain direction; and although among the uneducated it borrowed shape from the myths, superstitions, and customs, with which the common mind was already richly stocked, in an unencumbered intelligence it

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remained fluid and colourless, as rarefied, indeed, as any brain-spun metaphysics.

While he was thus meditating they came to another turn of the road that was to take them down from the plateau. At the bottom of the slope there spread a broad valley containing patches of open ground, and as their eyes wandered over it an encampment came into view. After they had moved on a little a closer scrutiny of the clustered tents showed that they belonged to some person of importance, but neither Hari nor Amar was prepared for the information given them upon riding up; they were told that the distinguished traveller was none other than Shaik Mobarek. At this news they exchanged glances; the encounter was not greatly to the liking of either of them, and they shared the sudden idea that perhaps it was not too late to push on. But while they were still halting in hesitation, the curtain before one of the tents was swept aside and Mobarek himself stepped out. Upon seeing them the old man had a movement of surprise, which, however, he was quick to transform into a gesture of welcome. The choice was thus taken out of their hands and a few moments later they found themselves seated as honoured guests in the principal marquee. It was a change abrupt enough to be somewhat disconcerting. While Mobarek was playing his part as host with all the manners of an accomplished worldling, Amar was more than a little stiff, and Hari felt hard put to it to keep up an appearance at all. His acquaintance with Mobarek did not go far, nor did he have an inclination to extend it. This little old mystic with his observant eyes, confident manners, and nimble tongue, certainly knew how to make the best of both worlds — and at this time Hari was feeling very little at home in either. Mobarek's gay, quick talk only confused him; he remained more or less in the clouds until a sentence came out that brought him down with a painful jerk. Mobarek had been telling them that he was on his way down from a visit to Prince Daniyal, who was passing the season in the uplands. 'And the charming Princess was there too,' he went on. 'We all spent the happiest fortnight together, and now I am escorting her down to her parents who are attending His Majesty on his way northward to Lahore. Yes, the dear child is with me now; she will be coming in presently. The wedding, I believe, is to take place in about three months' time.'

For the next few minutes Hari's nerves were stretched to the limit of his endurance — a condition which he hoped that Mobarek

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would not observe, or that he would be unable, at any rate, to account for. It was appalling, this idea that Lalita and he might, at any moment, find themselves face to face under Mobarek's inquisitive gaze. Unable to bear the strain he got up at last and left the tent, his excuse being that he liked to superintend the foddering of his horse himself.

Outside he looked about him, desperately undecided what to do. Two rows of tents stretched down the level turf, and behind them on the left rose a dark wall of young firs. He tried to think, but his brain refused its office; with the level evening sunlight pouring into his eyes, he could only blink and peer resourcelessly down the two lines of gleaming tents. Beyond them, not far distant, was the place where the horses were picketed; some grooms were moving about amongst them; but, by some odd chance, there was no one else about; no one handy to send with a message. . . .

Lalita — it confounded him to think of it — she must be somewhere within a dozen yards of where he stood. She might emerge, he supposed, at any moment. Would she be discomposed, would she think he was pursuing her, would she be angry — or glad? As his imagination got under way a new and not unpleasurable excitement flowed through him. Lalita's image, which had grown dim of late, glowed forth again with all the colours of life. That golden skin! That tawny hair of hers! Those strong young limbs whose every turn and movement he had known — he still knew — so well! And then again he quailed; his spirit shrank away. No; he was not ready for this exigency. It was too much.

He had gone forward some thirty yards, and now once more he halted. What he needed was the time to recover self-possession and make up a plan of behaviour. His eyes turned to the compact thicket of young firs within such easy reach. Why not — for a brief space — just disappear?

This impulse wheeled him suddenly round into a narrow passage between two of the nearest tents, and at the back of them, before making his dive into the wood, he swept a furtive glance right and left. Five steps more and he would have vanished; but there, in the shadow of the left-hand tent, waiting for him, yes, evidently waiting and expecting — was Lalita herself. What shining eyes, what flushed cheeks! Oh, didn't he know that sparkle and that glow! And she caught hold of him: 'Couldn't you hear me? Couldn't you hear me? I was calling you, calling . . . I —' He seized her in his arms.

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The world disappeared behind the flare of his delight. But it was a madness of two or three seconds only. With unnecessary violence they flung themselves apart; Lalita had gone — disappeared, he imagined, into her tent; and when he came to himself again he was alone — far, far away it seemed from any human stir, deep in the silence and semi-darkness of the fir wood.



Less than two hours later Hari was seated at Mobarek's table with Lalita upon his right and Amar opposite. Lalita had perfect composure and chatted to Amar with a right measure of vivacity, while Mobarek, although full of attentions for his guests, was prodigal of paternal smiles and sallies in her regard. During the first part of the evening the only person to show signs of preoccupation was Amar, but later he took up his share in the talk, and as time went on Hari became the silent member of the party.

His hour in the wood had seen him through the crisis of his excitement. In that hour he had given himself a loose rein; he had rolled on the ground, shouted his laughter at the skies, shaken his fist at all the four corners of the world. He and Lalita were rebels, they snapped their fingers at circumstance, they defied the powers that be. If they chose they would run away together that very night. Lalita would have no fear; she was ready. Or, if other considerations came in, they would let the spin of a coin decide.

Since then his excitement had died down, but his attitude remained unchanged. Through the long evening hours he made Lalita his study; he could see that, like him, she had learnt more than a little since the miserable day of their parting; but he retained his conviction that he had read her temper aright. It was interesting, it was even a little pathetic, to mark how she had come under the discipline of the world and how its lessons, whether for good or ill, had sunk into her. Noteworthy was her grasp of present requirements and her confidence in her role. She had to present the picture of a happy, self-confident young woman, capable of assuming with ease the brilliant social position that her approaching marriage offered. To this end she had been training herself, and perhaps it even amused her to display before him her newly-acquired skill. Fluency in gossip, distinguished intimacies, familiarity with what was fashionable in art, music, and literature — all these she was showing off. But it gave Hari a pang to see her adopting the affectations, the catchwords, the sophisticated inanities, of Prince Daniyal's particular coterie; and still less easy to accept was her pretence that a genuine affection subsisted between Daniyal and herself. It was only a pretence — of that he felt sure —

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although no doubt she had often hoped that it was going to deceive her too. No doubt she had been making the best she could of her accepted lover. But true worldliness she would never achieve; her character contained both more and less than the necessary ingredients.

Thus the evening wore on until she rose to withdraw. First, she bent her head to Mobarek to receive upon her forehead a benedictory kiss, then she gave her hand to Hari with a formal smile; last, she turned to Amar, and in saying good night reminded him that — if he was really making such an early start next morning — it was also good-bye. It had all seemed very simple, but in truth it was not so. A message had passed in her pressure of Hari's hand; fever had again been injected into his veins. Quickly renewing his conversation with Mobarek, he tried to recover his calm; but his heart was beating out that it was certain — yes, yes, it was certain — that Lalita would be ready to receive him in her tent that night.

Not long after her departure he pleaded fatigue and withdrew. The night was fresh and the sky bright with moonlight, although the moon herself was still hidden behind the mountains in the east. He stood listening to the stillness; the only sound in all the valley seemed to be the lively accents of Mobarek's voice inside the tent. As he walked slowly down the row it struck him that he still was uncertain which was Lalita's. One of them, however, was lit from inside by a faint rosy glow and he marked its position with care.

Sitting at the entrance of his own tent he looked up again into the blue-black sky and presently his eyes fell upon a vision that caught his breath and rapt him out of himself. Hung unimaginably high in the dome of heaven there gleamed a frosted slope, a snow-field which the moon had turned to silver. He gazed at it until his wonder melted into an inexplicable longing and his longing into a biting sadness.

With a shiver he got up at last, but just as he was about to retire into his tent he observed a tall figure approaching over the grass and recognized Amar. As Amar drew nearer it seemed to him that there was something purposeful in his gait; a reluctance, too, in the slowness with which he stalked forward. He waited until Amar stood before him, and then, — interpreting the other's silence in his own fashion — he invited him with a gesture into the tent.

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Inside, a small light was burning; Amar sat down at the little table and he himself sat down opposite. It was some moments before either of them spoke.

'What I have to tell you is that I saw . . .' And Amar knitted his brows. 'Good God!' he added with unaccustomed vehemence. 'What kind of madness possessed you?'

Hari was silent.

'Mobarek and I came out of the tent two minutes after you left. We were actually following you, and hardly more than a dozen yards behind.'

'Did Mobarek see?'

'No. He had stopped for a moment to look into the Princess's tent.'

'Lucky!' said Hari drily.

Amar, still frowning, continued to study him. 'I have no wish to interfere in your affairs. . . . That you will surely understand. But all the same . . .' He made a pause. He was waiting; but Hari waited, too, and thus they eyed one another.

At last Hari gave a shrug and a smile. 'After all — we make our start at daybreak to-morrow. And that being so . . .'

Amar ignored this; his eyes remained fixed upon Hari's face. There was meaning in that look, and now Hari was the one to frown. A flush, too, rose to his cheeks, nor was it difficult to see that anger caused it.

'Well?' he challenged.

Amar stirred and muttered in the extremity of his annoyance. 'Heaven knows,' he said again, 'I have no wish to mix in your affairs, but it is obvious that Princess Lahita and you are already intimate. In fact, by putting two and two together, I think I can . . .' He broke off. 'Is it necessary for me to go on? All that I require of you now is an assurance . . .'

'Of what?'

'That you will commit no follies to-night.'

Hari threw back his head and gave an angry laugh.

'You consider me intrusive, perhaps?' And Amar's tone was frigid with distaste. 'All the same I must go through with what I conceive to be my duty. The happiness — the lives, possibly — of many people are at stake.'

'Very well!' And suddenly leaning forward, Hari drummed with his fingers upon the table. 'Very well! Let us thrash this matter out!'

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Amar drew back with something like dismay. 'Is a discussion really necessary? Surely your good sense . . .'

'No!' said Hari. 'And to tell you the truth, I have no good sense at my disposition — at any rate, not to-night.'

Amar was silent; and looking straight into his eyes, Hari went on: 'I am tired of expediency. Do you understand?'

'Expediency?' Amar gave a weary sigh.

'I see no reason why I should respect other people's petty conveniences. I have never much regarded my own.'

There was no reply.

'Lalita feels as I do.' Hari laughed and snapped his fingers. 'She is ready. Very well!'

At this, with a muffled exclamation, Amar threw himself back in his seat. The light of anger shone in his eyes, and he said: 'You may treat yourself as you please, but common decency forbids that you should risk . . .'

'Oh, I know what you mean, my dear Amar!' Hari's eyes had now caught the spark. 'You mean that I ought to bear in mind that you have been busily currying favour with Lalita's father — and that the person responsible for bringing you two together was Ambissa — and that the whole trend of your policy is towards Daniyal. You want me to bear in mind that your future relationship with Daniyal might be prejudiced if it were to happen that I, your brother-in-law, whilst in your company, made off with his betrothed.'

Amar, visibly, had to struggle to control himself. 'These taunts are undeserved. But I am not here to defend myself. If you choose to think that I am actuated merely by self-interest, you may do so. I shall be satisfied if I succeed in dissuading you. . . .'

Hari was not listening. A singular agitation had taken possession of him and he interrupted with violence.

'Amar! Have you the cynicism to approve of that girl's marriage to Daniyal? And are you going to have the cynicism to attach yourself to Daniyal's party? Answer me plainly, for worldliness should have the courage of its convictions.'

'You are mixing up things that do not belong together.' And Amar stiffened. 'The choice between Salim and Daniyal is a political one. I am not interested in Daniyal's private affairs. What business have *you* to concern yourself with them? And as for the kind of interference you appear to be contemplating now . . .'

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‘What about love?’

‘I see, you are smiling,’ replied Amar, ‘and your smile answers you.’

Hari shook his head. ‘No Nor do you understand.’ He got up and poured himself out some water. ‘I have come to such a pass that I cannot measure my feelings at all’

These words were followed by silence. Amar was scrutinizing him in some surprise; Hari was in the grip of an emotion, the nature of which was obscure to him.

‘Listen!’ Hari went on with a kind of sombre impetuosity, ‘your mind is too reasonable for me, and believing, as I do, that reason itself is delusive, I prefer to take my delusions from nearer to their source. Since man needs must be mad, I prefer to be mad in a simpler, easier way. I will tell you why you don’t believe in a God, Amar. Your reason tells you that if there is a God He must certainly stand outside reason Himself. To begin with, no God, sane after your pattern, would have constructed a world on such lines as this. Look about you! What is there in nature that your reason can understand or approve? The rising of sap in the trees, the unfolding of flowers, the swarming of bees, the mating of beasts, everywhere birth and death with a little interval of wantonness and waste in between. All this you condemn, and perhaps rightly. But what if I prefer to let my life flow as unreasoning Nature wills?’

A thoughtful look had come into Amar’s face and his eyes were now bent upon the ground.

‘I think I begin to understand you better,’ he pronounced after an interval.

‘Do you?’ Hari shot a sidelong glance at him. ‘What do you understand?’

‘This: the world presents itself to you as alien and even antagonistic, and you intend your acts to be acts of rebellion. But that attitude is vain. Could you, but for one moment, see yourself and the world in their true relation, you would be ashamed at your absurdity. You would see that you are separated from the whole by delusions only — the delusions clustering about the Self. Ah! then you would see that liberty is not the liberty to rebel, and you would cease to be a child who beats at the stone over which it has just stumbled.’

Hari smiled as he made his reply. ‘No; my rebelliousness is

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less simple than that. You see, I am without your absolute confidence in a particular scheme of values. You are a good Buddhist; and life, you hold, must of necessity be uneasiness, distressfulness, vanity, and vexation of spirit. Perhaps I agree so far; but with you it follows that life as a whole is an evil which might well be brought to an end. With that I disagree. Life stretches illimitably before us as well as behind us, and we possess no standards by which to judge its worth. Not in terms of reasonableness, or of happiness, or of any accepted good, can it be judged. Life, taking it in the large, gives us one hint only — I should say, only one single command: Live!

Amar looked at him searchingly. 'I am no hedonist. But I respect wisdom, and if wisdom brings happiness in its train, I see no reason to reject it. There is no glory in continuing to flounder through the miseries of sensuality, ill-will, and ignorance.'

He paused; for a space the two men considered one another; then Hari said:

'I think it is you who are the rebel, Amar; and a more desperate one than I, for what you are rebelling against in yourself is more powerful than either reason or morality.'

Having spoken these words, Hari moved to the tent entrance and stood looking out into the night. As Amar considered the outline of his head and shoulders, his earlier fears melted away. The atmosphere had strangely altered since the beginning of their colloquy. He heard the intake of Hari's deep breaths and saw him shiver from the chill of the air; then Hari returned and threw himself down upon his seat.

'Well?' He smiled wanly. 'And what do you say now?'

Amar was silent.

'You have gained your point. I suppose that is enough?'

'You have decided well,' murmured Amar.

'The spirit rises in one, and the spirit dies down. . . .' His regard had become ironical; and after a minute he went on: 'But what of her? Has it died down in her too?'

'You have given her up once before,' said Amar. 'This — all this — has been her doing. And it is sheer folly.'

Hari eyed him with a certain curiosity. 'Are you actually — a little bitter against her?'

'Bitter? No, no!'

'My friend,' said Hari in a tone of rather dreary raillery, 'I am

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not sure that in one branch of self-knowledge at least I have not out-distanced you. You have made no terms with the feminine in yourself, and of that we all partake. Some day it may wreak vengeance upon you.'

Amar smiled enigmatically. 'The feminine has its own path — but to the same goal. Women, too, have their special gift — which I leave to them.'

'I envy you your certainties.'

'There is one which, by itself, is enough.'

'And that?'

Amar had risen from his seat. 'Above all doubts there rises our intuition of the moral law. Nor have you forgotten it, Karma, the noblest intuition of our race.'

Hari made no reply. After waiting a moment Amar went slowly outside, and together they stood looking up into the vault of the night.

'I know,' said Hari in an undertone, 'I know that the sun will rise in the east; would to God I felt equally certain that evil bore with it its inevitable expiation.'

'It does.'

These words fell with a heavy stroke, but Hari's face did not change.

'Know this,' continued Amar, 'there is a distinction between causation in dead matter, causation in the organic world, and causation in the animate world, where the operation of moral law is superimposed upon the natural. This is Karma; it is the chief force in the universe inasmuch as it controls life's gradual progress towards final deliverance.'

Hari, whose eyes had been lifted to the night sky, now fixed them once again upon his companion.

'You must tell me more about these things,' he muttered after a pause.

Amar inclined his head.

'Thoughts like those came to me in the forest,' said Hari slowly. 'But there were others, too.'

THE valley was full of mist when Hari and Amar set out in the dawning of the next day. A pale, unfriendly light filtered down from overhead; the damp air seemed to blow chillingly against them as they breasted it, and yet there was no stir in the endless ranks of tall, dark trees, and the mist coiled and uncoiled after its own lazy will. In the course of the morning they travelled up into a mild sunlight; the afternoon found them ranging along the shoulder of a hill; and before the sun had sunk far they were able to look down into the little valley of Ravi which was their destination. Amar could now point to the grey shingle roof of his father's house. It had been built on a small spur running out into the flat valley-bed, which was nearly all occupied by a shallow lake. The lake was fringed with willows and other water-loving trees; large stretches of it were covered with what looked like rushes and water-lilies; and flocks of birds kept rising and settling upon its surface. A cloudy sky hung above, but now and then a few watery beams would stray along the valley, silvering the water and lighting up the silvery green of the willows.

In this scene there was one feature that arrested Amar's attention, a group of gaily decorated tents close to his father's house. As he looked at them it dawned upon him that the encampment must be Prince Daniyal's; and, although Mobarek had prepared him for the Prince's presence somewhere in the neighbourhood, it was a surprise to find him so near as this. Why had Daniyal not pitched his camp upon the usual ground on the other side of the lake? The reason did not become apparent until they were half-way down the slope, and then they saw that recent heavy rains had flooded the whole valley, turning the level water-meadows into a wide marsh. But surely, thought Amar, the Prince might have gone to some other place altogether, for it was obviously unfitting that a house where an old lady lay dying should be surrounded by the bustle of a royal encampment.

Upon reaching the house he committed Hari to the care of his father and hastened to his mother's bedside. Rajah Bihar was hardly known to Hari, who remembered him just well enough to perceive how greatly he had aged since their last meeting.



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A profound pity for the poor old man seized upon him at once, and this sentiment was dominant in his mind during the whole of his stay. For the next few days he had to spend his time almost uninterruptedly in the aged Rajah's company, for a heavy storm which broke out in the night continued without a single break. Day and night the house resounded to the rush and rattle of the gale, and, although he would gladly have passed the hours tramping about the wet hillsides, he saw himself obliged to sit in the semi-darkness indoors in order not to wound the feelings of his host. The house was an old-fashioned building, picturesque in the fashion of a bygone day, and no doubt pleasant enough in sunny weather, but inexpressibly gloomy when the rain came down like this. Its would-be quaintness and cosiness then revealed themselves as nothing better than ugliness and dark discomfort. But it was the atmosphere of the house that oppressed Hari most; it breathed a stale breath of decrepitude which seemed to stifle the heart. And then too, alas! at all times and everywhere, hovering feebly and solicitously about him, was the tremulous figure of the old Rajah.

In his youth Rajah Bihar had been dapper and he retained a certain spruceness even now. Every morning he went through the ritual of a careful toilet and presented himself to the world with as soldierly a bearing as he could. His code bade him not only hide his feelings, but pass hurriedly over all his personal concerns. His daily reports on his wife were curt and, as it were, apologetic, giving place quickly to topics of more general interest. To make talk, to keep up appearances, was absolutely essential to his self-respect. Deep as his devotion to the Ranee was, sometimes in the midst of his talk he would actually forget to obey a summons to her bedside. His grief was the grief of the aged; buried under the ash of so many burnt-out years, it had no strength to flame; it smouldered, it smouldered; and how should it do more?

At times, as he was sitting stiffly in his chair opposite, Hari could see the swelling sorrow mount up into his watery old eyes. But then, clearing his throat and smoothing his white moustache with a fine silk handkerchief, he would launch out upon an ocean of commonplaces, and the sound of his own voice seemed to have a miraculous power to comfort him. The truth was that although able to keep up his self-respect and courage, these were the last qualities that he retained. So empty was his intelligence that

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Hari could not help hoping that it had never, even at its best, been anything more than mediocre; and how cynical, in any case, was the work of time; to leave self-respect and courage so naked that they — even they — appeared almost ridiculous. But perhaps — perhaps the old Rajah's stoicism was not so poignant after all. Perhaps it had its roots sunk deep in the knowledge that he could, and in the end he would, welcome Time's ultimate robbery, Life's ultimate consolation, the loss of the power even to suffer.

After the first few days Hari and Amar began to see a little more of one another and in these novel conditions each gradually discovered unsuspected elements in the other's character. Gratitude mingled with Amar's surprise at the surpassing patience shown by Hari towards his father. There was something in this, and in the whole of his present disposition, that the Rajah would have liked to understand better. Why did he prolong his stay in this house of discomfort and sadness? It looked almost as if he were deliberately subjecting himself to a new discipline; and the story came into Amar's mind how Buddha, when in the pride of youth, had gone forth one day and chanced to meet a woman stricken with disease, a man infirm with age, and a corpse. Legend had it that this incident marked a crisis in his spiritual development; and what if it should turn out that these days at Ravi were to make a similar turning point in Hari's career? In their talks together Hari showed that one side of his nature was deeply responsive to the Buddhist doctrine, but it was equally clear that there was another side that rebelled. In some of his arguments Amar was quick to observe the influence of Sita. For instance, what excellence, he would say, could one attribute to the ideal of self-extinguishment — more especially if it was sought merely as an appeasement of life's unrest? If pain and evil were inherent in individuality, happiness and goodness were also inconceivable apart from it. The true condition of blessedness must be one in which individuality was not extinguished but refined, intensified, and enlarged. Perfected selves, then, might be expected to continue their own existence — not primarily as enjoyers of happiness, but as centres for the radiation, the absorption, the interaction, of the world's ultimate goodness and beauty.

Amar remembered having heard this before and he could only answer now as he had answered then. Those were theories which experience could neither prove nor disprove; Buddhism was satisfied

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with another task; it would not choose to call itself a philosophy, or a religion, or even an ethic. It was not properly a philosophy, inasmuch as it dismissed most of the questions raised in metaphysics as entirely devoid of meaning; it was not a religion, inasmuch as it rejected dogma and made no concessions to desires that were vain; it were not an ethic, because it did not regard morality as the highest category; right behaviour, it said, was not an end in itself, but merely one of the conditions that a man must satisfy in order to reach his goal. Buddhism did not profess to explain the world or to justify it; it did no more than teach the way of deliverance. The truth of its pronouncements was not susceptible of logical proof, because the truths of logic were truths in and for logic only; they were not truths in and for reality. The truths of reality were ultimate; and, although partially expressible in terms of conceptual knowledge, were not fully apprehensible in that sphere. They had to be felt as well as heard. They had to prove themselves in the immediate inward experience of the initiate. The teacher said: 'It is thus!' and when the learner had learnt to see that thus it was, he rested upon his immediate intuition. 'Knowledge,' said Amar, 'and by that I mean conceptual knowledge — propounds two riddles for every one that it solves. By standing outside the world to judge it, you create the subject-object relation which is a condition of knowledge, but an obstacle to the grasp of ultimate truth. The highest function of knowledge is to adjust itself to wisdom. And wisdom I define as the possession of ultimate truth. Wisdom does not answer all the riddles that knowledge propounds; it dissipates them.'

This and much more did Amar explain in the semi-darkness of his father's inhospitable guest-chamber, with the rain obstinately hissing and drumming upon the roof, and the old Rajah, as often as not, dozing in a corner. Sadly, bitterly, did Hari contrast this wintry doctrine with the summer radiance of Sita's beliefs. And was it not something of a paradox that she had brought him an experience that lent weight, not to her view of life, but to Amar's? He was flying from her because this world was so ordered that the good here below could not be realized positively; it could only be shadowed forth in the ghostly shapes of abstinence and renunciation — earthly images of the ultimate Nirvana.

In these talks Hari and Amar drew together, but in a sphere far removed from everyday life, and it could not be said that they

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made any advance in real intimacy. If, covertly, they were giving each other a more interested observation than ever before, the cause of this lay elsewhere; it arose through the agency of Prince Daniyal. The position had been taking shape in this wise: the old Rajah had been naively excited and even flattered by the Prince's choice of a site, by the mere circumstance of his propinquity. In the first days this had been his staple topic; it inspired him with endless reminiscences of Court and camp; he took immense pride in having been on terms of intimacy with Akbar when the Emperor was a young man. It was plain that he hourly expected the Prince to make some sign of recognition of this, to show him a little more than the bare bones of civility; and while common courtesy enjoined a visit, the Prince, he made sure, would show him some small extra attention. It was lamentable, therefore, to count the days going by without this visit taking place, and to observe how a veil of chagrin thickened over the old man's earlier anticipations. First at one window and then at another he would watch with a brooding eye the activities of Daniyal's retinue; but while his feelings were hurt, his pride still held out. He did his best not only to ignore the Prince's neglect but to extenuate the unseemliness of the commotion that was made around the house.

Every day, every hour, added to the smart, and although he spoke hardly a word, one could see what form his bewilderment and pain were taking. The behaviour of Akbar's son must mean that ever since his retirement from active service he had been living under a delusion. It had been a delusion that his name was of good report, that he was remembered at Court with respect and even — by some — with affection. This was all a dream; he had been forgotten; he was nothing. But, no! it was more likely that evil tongues had been busy about him and that his fair fame had been besmirched. Either one thing or the other; and now — well, there was no redress, it was too late to do anything.

With the spectacle of Rajah Bihar's distress constantly before one's eyes how was it possible to avoid having the Prince's presence outside the gates on one's mind all the time? And yet Hari had very soon found that the subject was not to be mentioned to Amar. Well, he thought at first, Amar no doubt did right to pass over Daniyal's unmannerliness with scorn; but later he could not rest in this opinion. Amar's obstinate silence, the air of complete

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indifference that he affected, became intolerable and threw Hari into an irritated mystification. A man needs must be either more or less than human not to foster some resentment at such behaviour. There was no doubt that Amar found himself in a sorry predicament; he had to choose between being a bad Buddhist or an inhuman son. But why couldn't he be more open about it? For whose benefit was he wearing this mask of unconcern, which in truth, only drew attention to the feelings that it hid. It looked as if Amar was being disingenuous with himself, as if he was unable to judge this episode on its own merits. One suspected him of taking glances into the past and into the future; of feeling that the miserable little affair made — or threatened to make — complications. The arrangements he had just completed, the course he had mapped out — was everything to be upset by — well, just by this?

But enough! Hari went on to himself. Putting Amar out of the question, what of his own temper, his own attitude, in regard to the Prince? The moment had come when he was obliged to look closely at the matter, because, at last, the expression on poor old Rajah Bihar's face had become too much for him and he was determined to take the affair into his own hands. In the first flush of his resolve he told himself that while Amar, not being acquainted with the Prince, could not very well take the initiative, it would be a perfectly simple thing for *him* to do so. But — was it? The more he thought about it the less he liked it. True, at the end of that hunting trip four years ago, he and Daniyal had parted on perfectly good terms; but mightn't Daniyal have changed in the interval — just as he himself had? Of course, in his own case, there was Lalita; and he hadn't the shadow of a reason to suppose that Daniyal wasn't innocent of all knowledge in *that* direction. But he honestly believed that his altered attitude towards Daniyal was not so much due to jealousy as to one of those changes that arise from a re-interpretation of character in the light of after-experience. Well then! the approach was not one that he could make so confidently after all. He would make it, but he would contrive to give the meeting an accidental appearance; nor could he feel quite happy about the manner of his reception.

AMAR spent many hours at his meditations. Sitting alone in an inner chamber, his back to the window, his eyes fixed upon a blank wall, he struggled daily with an exercise known as the Bramah Vihara. 'Let thy mind,' so the charge ran, 'pervade one-quarter of the world with thoughts of love, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere, thou shalt continue to pervade with heart of love, far-reaching, grown great, and beyond measure. And just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard, and that without difficulty, towards all the four directions, even so of all things that have shape or form there is not one thou shalt pass by or leave aside; but regard them all with mind set free and deep-felt love.' This exercise was to be repeated, substituting for love first pity, then sympathy, then equanimity. It was a meditation designed to break the fifth fetter, that of Ill-will. The first four fetters in their order were Delusions pertaining to the Self, Doubt, Reliance upon the efficacy of Good Works, and Sensuality. Until quite recently Amar had believed that his freedom from these shackles was won, and that he was therefore entitled to consider himself fairly launched upon the path. But that confidence had now vanished. He had been smitten with an agonizing uncertainty whether the whole structure of his spiritual life was not in jeopardy. A seam had suddenly appeared upon the smooth wall of the edifice, a flaw which seemed to proclaim that the actual foundations were at fault. Ill-will had taken a hold upon him; and ill-will, he knew, can only subsist in a mind still obscured by self-love.

In this secluded chamber of his he had already wrestled for many hours and days, and his distress had steadily increased. He felt like a man who sees his life threatened, not by the blow of a sword, but by the prick of a pin. For his trouble in its external origin was paltry — a trifle of the meanest sort. But its very paltriness, by exasperating him, added to its venom. Deep was the humiliation of the thought that while his mother lay dying he had a mind to fret over a small piece of discourtesy on the part of a thoughtless young exquisite. That the slight was put upon his father and that his father took it so hard — no extenuation was to

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be found there — no, nor anywhere else. At such a time as this — no, no! To be pettily distracted at this moment of life; now, when it was his privilege to bear his mother company through her last days, her last hours, upon earth — God help him! — nothing could palliate the sorriiness of such a self-betrayal. Some hidden smallness of character was coming to light; a concealed debility, a rot — and a rot that was progressive.

Every day the poison of his self-preoccupation was spreading further and further through his system. He was fast becoming a spiritual hypochondriac; his will, strong for any other task he set it, balked before this: he could not put away that particular knot of trivial concern; his pride was roused; he could not achieve inattention to self. And the fact that he saw this, understood it, admitted it: this was the last link in the vicious circle of his self-bondage.

One morning, when he was sitting in his mother's room, there came a veritable crisis in his sufferings. His nerves had just been put on edge by a meeting with his father in the passage. In that off-hand manner of his that was so pitiful as a pretence the old Rajah announced that an application had just been made by Daniyal's chief cook: the man begged for the loan of some kitchen pots and pans; they were wanted for a supper-party that evening, which was to be a specially grand affair. Of course, said the old Rajah, he had replied that he was delighted to be of any service to His Royal Highness, delighted and honoured — of course, of course. . . . And rather guiltily, rather defiantly, he had shuffled away, bleating with a laugh that had no sense, and mumbling through his grey hairs.

It was with the flavour of this encounter on his palate that Amar sat by the window, reading aloud from the *Mahabharata*; and the magnificence of the thought and language served only to sharpen his self-disgust. Never had he felt more keenly the distinction between the essential and the trivial, the sacred and the petty; never had the wings of his spirit beat more frantically to reach the upper air; but never, alas! had his mortal nature responded more dully, never had his sense of frustration been more acute. He knew this passage so well that he had no need of the book; nevertheless, he kept his head bent over it, for he feared to meet the eyes that he knew were fixed upon him. In the last two days his mother had become so weak that it was plain the end must be very near. Those

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eyes that gazed with such a mysterious intensity, those lineaments that he loved above all others — not much longer would they belong to the world of material things. Memories! very soon they would be that. And this sunny morning in this quiet room — that, too, a memory, a memory! O bitterness of time, with love such a trifle in its immensity! And those last moments of closeness, passing, passing, passing; in how many hours would they be over and gone?

He heard his voice reading in the quiet room, he smelt the jessamine upon the air, his spirit struggled. There was no haven where it could find rest. The images of the world haunted him; his old father, Hari, Daniyal . . .

In the same voice he continued to read on, but presently his gaze wandered out through the window and swept the shining landscape. It fell upon three human shapes standing in a field of emerald grass, whilst around them in a circle there caracoled a piebald stallion held on a long rein. In spite of the distance he could see everything clearly, and his ear, suddenly extending its range, caught the sound — and even the intonations — of those far-away voices. One of the men was a groom, the other two were Hari and Daniyal. They were following the horse with their eyes, and some joke had just passed between them. He could tell from their movements and gestures alone what the tone of their intercourse was. Daniyal was flinging himself about, pirouetting, and kicking up the turf at his feet. Evidently he was in high fettle, and Hari, too, seemed . . .

Abruptly Amar averted his eyes, recalled his attention, and heard again the splendour of the verses that were falling from his lips. But what a new surge of emotion ran, hissing, over the uttered words. That meeting — he could not believe it had been wholly accidental. Hari was risking a snub to do what he himself, pocketing his pride, should perhaps, for his poor father's sake, have done. The perspiration broke out upon his brow; a hundred different ways of envisaging the case, a hundred conflicting modes of feeling, rushed forward to be examined in the grey north light of his self-mistrust. And all the time this was going on, a part of his mind was outside with those two men upon that sunlit field; another part was downstairs, in the shadows, companioning with exasperated pity his poor, foolish father; and yet another part was here, here in this room, seeing, hearing, feeling — every sense alert.



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Above all, he was conscious of his mother's mysterious regard. Whether those eyes of hers saw, or into what plane of existence her blank, dark vision penetrated, that he could not tell. Her eyes, so deeply sunk in that emaciated face, were like two holes through which a man might look into the darkness beyond life. To her, he imagined, nothing now remained but a sense of human mortality. She did not guess his anguish. No, no! She still believed in his security. She heard only the sound of his voice, which to her was tranquillity. Perhaps she had passed beyond everything now — even love. Love, which last of all would surrender its claim to life, love itself, had closed its eyes, murmured its own blessing, and died out of her heart. Certainly she was a very old woman, and very sick, and it was blessed that she should die. Blessed had she been in her simplicity; and even so — very simply, without doubt — without mistrust — let her pass out of life.

He would leave her now. He would leave her at this moment while he had the courage to look steadily into her face. Her lids had just dropped; but she was not dead — only asleep. He could still see the pulse beating in her neck. 'Your mistress is sleeping,' he whispered to an attendant, and without a sound he was gone.

Back in his own chamber he made no attempt to follow a course of prescribed meditation, but threw himself upon his couch and let his anguish lead him where it would. Gradually it abated. In the afternoon he found his mother able to speak. She was at peace, as he had forced himself to continue to believe. When he left her he was happier than he had been for some time. And so the day wore on.

In the evening, as he was sitting with his book, news came that Prince Daniyal was below. Yes, only a moment ago His Royal Highness had been ushered into the guest-chamber (the servant was all a-tremble with excitement), and the Maharajah, his father, urgently besought him to come down at once. Amar inclined his head, and for a little while after the man had gone remained sitting in his place with a countenance upon which there dwelt a smile. That smile had many shades of meaning; as a comment it fell most scathingly perhaps upon himself.

Downstairs he found Daniyal seated in the place of honour with two of his gentlemen in attendance, whilst the old Rajah was bowing out his ceremonious speeches. To these manners (which had been out of date for some time) Daniyal responded with sufficient

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amiability, although it was evident that not the whole of his attention was engaged. His glances wandered, and in his eyes there was a veiled gleam of amusement. No doubt, thought Amar, this distant twinkle had helped to earn for him the reputation of a man of humour. He looked as if he might be holding a witty thing up his sleeve. This, however, would hardly be an occasion for producing it

When everyone was seated refreshments were handed round and the exchange of civilities continued, the principal speakers being the old Rajah and one of Daniyal's gentlemen, whose special function it seemed to be to save the Prince unnecessary trouble of this kind. Now, at last, for the first time in his life, Amar had the opportunity of studying Daniyal at close quarters. He saw a good-looking young man of medium height, a fair-skinned, smooth-fleshed youth, who gave an impression of perfect physical well-being. Perhaps Daniyal was a trifle broad at the hips; perhaps he was a little too plump for his twenty years; his chin and mouth, maybe, were a shade too full in their modelling. But these imperfections might be considered insignificant; and perhaps it was some other and more inward blemish that reminded Amar that Daniyal was the son of Akbar by a slave. That thought, whatever its origin, was very prominently before him now, filling him with speculations about the girl whom he had never seen — that beautiful creature, who had died at Daniyal's birth — died after less than a year of notoriety, leaving her parentage and provenance unknown. Her beauty, by all report, had been of the kind that can only arise from an unusual mixture of blood. There was little doubt in many minds that she had taken from somewhere a strong Persian strain; but the more knowing in these matters let that pass as unimportant, and insisted that her most marked characteristics — the wonderful surface, the close texture, of her flesh — gave unmistakable indications of a possibly remote, but still prepotent, Chinese ancestry.

Amar's eyes rested upon Daniyal gravely, benignly; and no one (except possibly Sita or Hari) could have guessed how diligently the work of appraisal was going on behind that smooth brow. Daniyal, unquestionably, had comeliness and ease; he wore an air of negligent authority; he was as handsome a young prince as anyone could wish to see. All the hues and curves of youthful health were there; flawless the whites of his eyes and the enamel

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of his teeth, fresh the skin, and the hair as glossy as the coat of a well-groomed horse. Amar's attentive smile, the gentle side-tilt of his head, might well have been taken as tokens of approbation, of regard, of pleasure in the royal condescension. And it was true, and more than true, that Amar was pleased; only his pleasure was not of that sort at all, it was the pleasure of well-satisfied disdain.

How exactly had this come about? Amar himself would not have been able to say. Although he was observing Daniyal very carefully, his sentiment was not built up on any conscious assessment. It was too quick, spontaneous, and assured, for that. The scrutiny was merely confirmatory. And again, Amar's standards were so completely a part of his heritage that he was never really conscious in his application of them. All he knew was that in the presence of the Prince he got an immediate impression of vulgarity — or of something, at any rate, which for want of a better word had to be called vulgarity. It was a pity no other term would fit, because the defect was reflected so shadowily on to the external man; it was a defect of spirit, of the innermost spirit — something that betrayed itself primarily to the moral sense.

Further than this Amar did not care to go. It suited him to rest here; to feel what he felt, to see what he saw; with that he was more than content. The only thing that troubled him now was the sense of his past foolishness. Good heavens! To think that he had allowed his pride — even the surface of his pride — to be ruffled! Well, let this be a lesson; let him mark well that he was still liable to be impressed by a name, to be imposed upon — just like all the world — by the world's own rumour. As long as the object itself kept out of sight, he could still be fooled by its prestige.

After a few minutes the Prince rose to his feet and — much to his host's surprise and gratification — asked to be shown round the room. True, the old Rajah set no great store by his possessions, but the house stood as his parents had made it, and this gave it a certain place in his esteem. So the round began, and it was not long before Amar perceived that Daniyal was genuinely interested, only his interest was not at all of the kind his father imagined. The old gentleman had remembered that Daniyal was an amateur of the arts, and from the way in which the Prince paused before this object and that, he was led to believe that his house must really contain specimens of rarity that were fit to give pleasure to

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a connoisseur. Very soon, at his orders, dusty old lumber was being pulled out into the light; furniture, cumbrous and grotesque in every conceivable fashion, was dragged creaking from its corners; and Daniyal did, indeed, eye each piece as it came with an enjoyment that rose higher and higher. Throwing lively glances over his shoulder at his two companions, he loudly declared that never would he rest content until he had fitted up a room in his palace exactly similar to this. And he was speaking the truth, for it was one of his diversions to illustrate the sophistication of his taste by caricaturing antiquated modes.

Amar, in the background, followed this scene with an air of grave and yet smiling detachment. To see his father as ridiculous would have been to bring himself down to a plane within measurable distance of Daniyal's. No, what he saw was the Prince cutting so lamentable a figure that he was almost able to pity him.

When the tour of inspection was over, the Prince made ready to leave. He was in good humour now, and quite graciously he expressed his regret that the Ranee's state of health forbade him to hope that either his host or Amar would wish to attend his supper-party. To Hari, however, who at that moment came into the room, he offered an invitation.

After he had gone, the old Rajah, even more tremulous than usual, but also far more alert and erect, began strutting about the room with his most soldierly air. A fine young man, he swore; oh yes, you could see at a glance whose son he was. And this went on until it occurred to him to hurry upstairs, hoping that he might find his good wife able to share his satisfaction in the proud event.

His departure left the two others burdened with a good many small embarrassments. To get rid of one of them, to let Hari see where he stood, Amar put warmth into his tone and said: 'I know whom I have to thank for this visit; I caught sight of you this morning out of the window. Really, my dear Hari, that was a crowning act of kindness.'

Hari actually coloured. 'I can't think why I didn't do it before. The Prince showed himself perfectly amiable.'

After this they went on talking about Daniyal, and although the talk had a fair appearance of naturalness, there was considerable strain beneath the surface. Nothing said was more than a half-truth; to go further in any direction would be, each felt, a dangerous

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and difficult venture. But contact with Amar's mind (even of this gingerly sort) had the effect of concentrating Hari's attention upon the 'vulgarity' in Daniyal. His sense of it in the past had remained floating in suspension; a drop of acid from Amar's particular fastidiousness had been needed to precipitate it.

But if he got something from Amar's sensibility, did Amar get nothing in return? It seemed not. Amar was satisfied with what he could see out of his own eyes. He was careful not to say — but he implied — that after seeing the Prince for himself he simply could not imagine how anyone should find the slightest difficulty in describing him with a single word. But there, never mind! Perhaps other people had a vision that pierced deeper than his. This unspoken comment Hari found exceedingly irritating; but he could not very well retort to what had not been said.

Just as they were about to part, however, the atmosphere suddenly changed. They dropped into what seemed by contrast a pronounced bluntness.

'I don't think I shall go to Daniyal's supper-party to-night,' Hari announced without warning.

'Oh!' Amar looked his surprise. 'Why not?'

'I am not definitely committed.'

'But why not go?'

'Because I don't like that young man.'

Amar gave a little laugh. 'Like him? Of course you don't! How should you? Why should you? It is merely a question . . .'

Hari interrupted with a bark of impatience. 'Oh, I know your views.'

'It would seem,' remarked Amar blandly, 'more polite to go.'

A little ashamed of his outburst, Hari laughed. 'Very well then! I will.'

About an hour before dawn in that same night Amar was roused from sleep by Hari's manservant, who burst into the room with the news that his master had been seized by Daniyal's guards and placed under arrest. It appeared that Hari was accused of having behaved in a manner insulting to the Prince.

Amar's emotion was one of extreme annoyance and even of dismay. He was alarmed for Hari; something serious might lie at the back of this affair; the spleen of jealousy — dangerously disclosed — on Hari's side; or the animosity of an aroused suspicion on Daniyal's. And then he had his own position to think about.

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An unpleasantness of this kind would be apt to strain the relations of all concerned. It would certainly do him no good to fling himself in on Hari's behalf, and that was what he now had to do.

While making ready to go across to Daniyal's camp he racked his brains with profitless surmises; the thought that the Prince's rudeness to his father might have helped to bring the disaster about only served to inflame his annoyance. Without loss of time he presented himself at the Royal Tent, and although the Prince did not decline to see him, he refused all discussion, referring him to two of his gentlemen-in-waiting, with whom he was marched off. Throughout the whole length of the ensuing negotiations these two young men acted as go-betweens, and very incompetent and self-important and silly did they show themselves to be. A long, tedious comedy of recriminations, explanations and apologies (the apologies were all invented by Amar, for Hari remained sulky and obdurate) unrolled itself during the course of the morning. Hour after hour went by, at last noon came and went, and still the case remained undecided. It was illustrative of the absurdity of the proceedings that Amar never discovered how the trouble had actually arisen, nor did he even get it perfectly clear in his mind in what manner precisely Hari had offended. Nevertheless, in the end, his good offices were crowned with success; he was able to inform Hari that the Prince had relented so far as to agree to his being sent under escort to Agra, there to be detained during a further consideration of his case. 'You are getting off very lightly,' Amar went on, 'because although still technically under arrest, you will be lodged in the palace and your gaoler will be our good friend Narsing. Besides, I have been given to understand that at the end of a couple of weeks you will be told that Prince Daniyal has graciously accepted your apologies and granted you a pardon.' He spoke in a tone of weariness and exasperation, and Hari, although he had scowled at the word apologies, had the grace to express himself grateful. A few hours later he set out under escort for Agra.

Not many days later Hari found himself once again leaning over the balustrade of the Great Terrace at Agra. During his sojourn in the palace before joining Gokal in the Hills, he had become very familiar with the wide, heat-stricken prospect stretching away below; he had spent hours gazing over it, while his heart was aching unendurably for Lalita. The countryside looked different now under its veil of green, and his feelings for Lalita had changed their colour too.

Day after day, on his journey down from the Hills, he had ridden along deeply engaged by the changing company of his thoughts. They held him in an unbroken reverie from which not even his arrival in Agra had as yet sufficed to rouse him. Vaguely he had noticed that the bazaars, so thronged and noisy before, were now comparatively quiet; the place evidently had lost half its life with the departure of the Emperor from Fatehpur-Sikri. Then, too, the wet season had commenced, but without doing much to abate the heat; in the streets people were hanging about their doors listlessly; and at the great gate of the palace, instead of the usual crowd, there was only the gatekeeper and his guard.

His reverie continued until a step sounded behind him and Narsing's voice rang out. The tone was round and hearty, but, thought Hari, unless the evening light was deceiving him, the man's face had grown haggard and old. This hardly seemed possible in so short an interval, and yet — yes, weariness was dragging at those heavy features; and presently, as if giving in to the truth, Narsing let his tone change; he heaved a great sigh and said: 'You won't find much gaiety left here, I am afraid; nor will you find me a very cheerful companion. No, Hari Khan, I am out of sorts. I am dull. Dull' — he added in the manner of an aside — 'but not peaceful.'

While they were standing there the sun went down behind clouds and a roll of thunder came out of the distance. Hari was expecting to be questioned about Daniyal, but either from discretion or indifference Narsing left the subject alone. His mind, like his body, seemed to have become flaccid. He mopped his forehead; he drew difficult breath; his comments upon current affairs were

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gloomy and confused. After a while Hari interrupted him to inquire after Mabun; and at that Narsing threw up his hands and hunched his shoulders expressively. Mabun — let no one make any mistake! — was now a personage, a man of high dignity; honours had been showered upon him, so that he now took his place amongst the great ones of the land. 'Ah, that little fellow's cleverness!' he exclaimed at the end. 'He seems to know everything. He makes me feel like a child.'

They were still on this topic when the man himself appeared. There was a beaming welcome in his face, his voice was as crisp as ever, his gestures had lost none of their alertness. Hari was pleased by the cordiality shown him, for he had taken a liking to Mabun during his last stay in the palace. Without a moment's hesitation the latter began to question him about 'that little affair with the Prince'; but Hari, remembering that Mabun was by way of being on very good terms with Daniyal, was laughingly evasive in his replies.

During the next few days the rain was incessant and he mooned about the palace a prey to restlessness and self-dissatisfaction. Neither Narsing nor Mabun made their appearance, Narsing being in bed with fever, and Mabun — so the message went — busy with urgent State affairs. At last, upon an afternoon of dull, sullen heat, Hari ordered a horse, and, having given his parole, was permitted to go out riding by himself. Instinctively he turned his horse's head in the direction of the Royal Hunting Grounds and, upon reaching the wood, took a path in the direction of the deserted hunting-box where he had first met Gunevati. As he rode along memory and imagination grew busy with the scene, and his curiosity to see the place again grew stronger every moment. What a dreary aspect the house would wear under these grey skies! He could see it in his mind's eye standing wet and forlorn in the centre of its tangle of weeds. By now the weeds and vines would, he imagined, very nearly have submerged it.

After twice losing his way he came to what he took to be the place; and yet it seemed to him still that somehow he must be making a mistake. If it was the same clearing, what had become of the bungalow? Several moments passed while he stood staring; then he urged his horse forward until he came to some blackened stones with pieces of charred timber lying here and there amongst them. This, evidently, was all that remained of the building.



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but, unfortunately, two or three foolish people stood in my way.'

'I see,' said Srilata blandly.

There was a pause during which Hari seemed to be consulting his memory; but nothing came of it; all that he finally said was: 'Anyhow, it will soon all blow over.'

Srilata looked troubled. 'I gather that you took a violent dislike to Daniyal.'

'I confess I did.'

Srilata said nothing; and her silence told him quite plainly what it was that she was thinking: he was jealous of Daniyal; that had been the trouble.

Well, it suited him to leave it at that. Nevertheless, he must not, he felt, remain entirely dumb. 'It is a question of personality. I suppose.' He threw this out with a somewhat grudging air, 'Or you might call it a question of taste. Daniyal and his friends happened to offend my taste. It doesn't sound very important, I know; but you can see, I'm sure . . .'

What Srilata did see was that he was not inclined to go into details, and she had no idea of pressing him. Perhaps he had resented some reference (it might have been a slighting one, for she knew her Daniyal) to Princess Lalita. Whilst respecting his reserve, she was also somewhat disquieted by it. When a man is reticent about his past follies the reason often is that he nourishes the intention of repeating them. Before taking his leave, too, Hari added another shade to her misgivings; he asked her for her opinion of Mabun: 'Just how far is that nice little fellow to be trusted? That's what I want to know,' he said.

'Not so far as me!' she answered smiling, and a rather significant pause had preceded her reply.

'Of course not; I know that. But still — within reason, I suppose?' For a second he seemed to consider deeply. 'Is he really — at bottom — such a friend of Daniyal's?'

'Yes, certainly. At least I have no reason to think otherwise.'

She said this with great decision, and it seemed to her that Hari was allowing her words their full emphasis. But, with him, you never knew. . . . What, she wondered, could he be meditating now? After he had left, she raised her eyebrows and sighed.

To get a view of Mabun divested of his charming manners, a view of him in workaday dress, that had been Hari's ambition for a long time. The way to do it occurred to him the next morning;

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so he put on some very old clothes and went round to the back of the palace buildings, where there was generally a small crowd waiting for an audience with the great man. Mirgling with the rank and file he was duly admitted into a waiting-poom, and from there, when the porter's back was turned, he slipped into the immense hall at the far end of which Mabun was transacting business. Standing among some men who were being called up, one by one, for examination, he stared across the room at what was going forward. The spectacle fascinated him. Those quick little gestures of Mabun's, the narrowing eyes, a glance that darted, an intelligence that you could see pouncing on its point. At what a pace that mind went! There was never a moment when Mabun's thought was not obviously far in advance of everybody else's. It was doubly clear now that amongst his social equals he habitually did his best to hide his advantage; but here he was ruthless; he cut his interlocutor short; his least word had a terrible trenchancy. Two or three minutes, as a rule, sufficed for each man; when the interview took longer he was weighing not merely the speech but the speaker, and then sometimes he would become leisurely, almost suave; his head nodded understandingly, his eyelids drooped. But after an interval this manner would be whisked off; he would straighten himself, and the few words that were rapped out sent the man smartly about his business.

At length, having seen enough, Hari pushed his way through the front line of onlookers and waited for the moment when Mabun's eye should fall upon him. It happened soon enough, and with a sharp movement of surprise the examiner paused; then presently, after dismissing the creature before him, he hurried down the room. 'Hari Khan, what brings me this unexpected honour?' Hari laughed and murmured nothing definite, but in the long, smiling look that he fixed upon Mabun something significant was no doubt conveyed. At any rate there came a pause, a brief interval in which Mabun seemed to be registering a new intimation. His manner, which in coming forward had had all its usual gay urbanity, again tightened, but with a difference. Hari had before him neither the man of society, nor the man of business, but yet another.

'Let me see' — his glance swept the room — 'I think I can break off now. Yes, if you will excuse me for one moment, Hari Khan. . . .'

He beckoned to an assistant and gave orders. 'There, I am

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ready now. Follow me, if you please. I am at your service.' And he led the way out of the hall by a side-door.

They went down several passages in the direction of the suite where Mabun had been in the habit of receiving him. Mabun's manner was grave, with a particular gravity that Hari had never seen him wear before; furthermore, he appeared to be revolving some very difficult thoughts. After they had gone a little way he stopped. A decision seemed to have ripened; he halted beside a window and by its light subjected Hari to a friendly, but probing, scrutiny. 'Yes,' he pronounced at last, 'I think we might as well have our talk in here.' Taking a few steps down another passage, he unlocked a small door, and, smiling a little, he bade Hari enter. 'I will join you,' he said, 'in ten minutes.'

The room in which Hari found himself was small, comfortably furnished, but not well aired; and this at once drew his attention to the fact that the windows were so high above the ground that no one could see in from outside. The moment the door closed he began looking about him. He was conscious of an excitement which went deep, but was well under control. He knew that he was about to disregard Srilata's warning. After all, one had to follow one's own instincts about a man; and the sight of Mabun at work had, somehow, brought him to a determination. As he looked around, Mabun's rather deliberate choice of this little room was a stimulus to his curiosity. Books and musical instruments were lying about, and in one corner there was a hookah with some charred tobacco still in the bowl. (That was odd, perhaps, for Mabun did not smoke.) On a table in the opposite corner there lay an object wrapped in silk. Before this Hari paused, and then suddenly snatched it up. His fingers ran along the silk, feeling at what was underneath; then he untied the silken cord, pulled off the covering, and brought to light just what he had begun to expect — Lalita's riding-whip.

For a minute or two he stood there, looking straight before him and smiling to himself. Then he swished the whip through the air and laughed gently. It had certainly been very tactful of Mabun to give him ten minutes in which to think matters over. But ten minutes, ten days, or ten years — it was all the same! Was Mabun the man he took him for? Everything hinged upon that.

'WELL!' said Mabun, entering briskly, 'I hope, my dear Hari Khan, you found something to interest you during my absence? Ah!' he exclaimed, his smile expanding, 'I see you did.'

Hari was still standing on the same spot and the whip was still in his hands. Swishing it through the air once more, he gave Mabun a long, level look; and the smile, on his side, was a questioning one.

'A very fine gem that — in the handle,' Mabun remarked with the gentlest of malice.

• 'Oh, very!'

Amusement was reflected on both faces, and it was with a particularly friendly shade of courtesy that Mabun invited his guest to be seated. He himself sat down on the same divan, facing and quite near.

'My dear Hari Khan' — and his delicate hand fluttered out to give a reassuring touch to Hari's knee — 'I am going to explain everything as quickly as I can. You must on no account be disconcerted. Your secrets are quite safe in my keeping.'

Hari nodded. Although he certainly had every reason to be disconcerted, what he experienced for the moment was rather a feeling of elation.

'Incidentally, I shall have to tell you a good many secrets of my own,' Mabun continued. 'It is fortunate that we can trust one another, because, as you will see, our paths have met and we are destined to travel along side by side. Now, first of all, listen to this: Prince Daniyal is no friend of mine.'

At this — so prompt and unequivocal a confirmation of his suspicions — Hari almost started; at any rate, he revealed his feelings sufficiently to cause Mabun to smile and say:

'Yes, that is important, is it not?' A slight pause underlined the words before he went on: 'And now, something more, my friend: for the last three years I have been busy weaving a net in which to snare the Prince; and at last my net, I think, is strong enough to hold him. For the last three years, Hari Khan, I have studied my man; all his goings-out and comings-in have been watched. The task has not been easy because it would have been fatal if the

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kinds of reasons he will have for so doing. Few people lie entirely without reason, and in most cases the reasons are good. So many people ask to be lied to and deserve nothing better. You see, it takes two to make a lie; and it is the stupidity, or the prejudice, or the self-conceit, of one party that makes the lie necessary. Hari Khan, you are a man to whom certain lies would be most repugnant. But there are more important things in the world than truth-telling, my friend! And sometimes it is a sin to be squeamish. Is that not so? For a brief instant only he paused. It was evident that he did not really wish for an answer. 'Are you waiting for more evidence of my confidence in you? Well, well; you shall have it! You shall have it! But is it not time that you opened your mind to me — just a little — in return?'

At the end of this strange dissertation Mabun laughed softly, looking deep into Hari's eyes as he did so. Nothing could well be more engaging, and Hari smiled and stirred uncomfortably as if only too conscious of his churlishness.

'Mabun Das,' he said at last. 'Ask me what questions you will. I will not refuse to answer them.'

Mabun sketched a light gesture in the air. 'Why should I want to catechize you, my friend? Are *you* not the best judge of what I should be told? There may be things I should like to hear; there may be things I have no business to hear. You are not a fool, Hari Khan. You guessed that I was no friend of Prince Daniyal's; else why did you come to me this morning?'

'Yes. I guessed that.'

'Exactly.'

Hari pursed his lips. 'Forgive me! I take no interest in politics.'

'My friend,' said Mabun slowly, 'if you are involved you are involved. But why trouble yourself about the political aspect of the affair. Leave that to me. Let this question stand in your mind as a personal one.' He paused. 'Let it be simply a question' — he paused again and leant forward with very bright eyes — 'a question of planting your heel upon the neck of the cobra.'

Hari considered and finally gave a nod. 'Very good. What then?'

'First of all,' said Mabun decisively, 'there comes this quarrel of yours with the Prince. You must let me know how you stand.'

Hari got up and stretched his cramped limbs. 'I don't know if you will understand me,' he said in a quiet voice; 'but even now

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I am quite uncertain<sup>4</sup> what my feelings about Daniyal really are. When I say I detest him, does that cover the whole ground? The Prince, even as a boy, commanded my admiration. And the other day I found that his personality worked upon me like a challenge. I know him to be courageous. He is prepared to follow his wickedness wherever it may lead him.'

Standing in front of Mabun, he looked down into his face and frowned thoughtfully. 'I suppose you want to hear about that supper-party?' There was an inflection in his voice at which Mabun inwardly smiled. He, too, like Srilata, knew his Daniyal well, and with a ready tact he set about helping his interlocutor out. That brilliantly-lighted tent and those twenty or thirty young men, for the most part powdered and scented — how well he could imagine it, he mused aloud. He, in his time, had assisted at more than one such gathering. But no doubt for Hari it had been a new experience — and not an agreeable one? Oh no, in fact really rather nauseating. . . . That chatter, those finicking manners, those airs of *petit maître* and *petite dame* combined. The sniggering delight they took in one another's mean little immoralities! Yes, yes, he could well see how Hari's impatience, his disgust, must gradually have reached boiling point; but — how had the crisis come? What, actually, had happened?

The blend of curiosity and sympathy in Mabun's manner was really intensely droll; and Hari laughed out loud; it was a laugh made rough by the memories evoked. 'I will tell you exactly what happened, and you shall judge whether I had any excuse for losing my temper. Late in the evening a certain fair-haired youth, who was sitting next to Daniyal at table, left the room and presently returned dressed in a girl's clothes. Sitting himself down by Daniyal again, he proceeded to mimic Princess Lalita in her speech and manners. Daniyal was evidently prepared for the entertainment, for he played up. He completed the scene by fondling the creature and addressing him as "Lalita darling."'

Having spoken, Hari waited for Mabun's comments; but none came. For once in his life Mabun was experiencing disgust — or, at any rate, he had the tact to make it seem so. For a decent interval he turned his head away; then, after brushing the displeasing images aside — 'The report,' he said in a studiedly level voice, 'the report stated merely that you had acted in a manner insulting to the Prince. I should like to ask: What did you actually do?'

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Hari repeated what he had said to Srilata. 'And that's the whole story.'

'You spoke no word to anyone?'

'I said nothing at all.'

Mabun nodded and closed his eyes. 'What we have to consider is whether Daniyal acted with the express object of making you reveal yourself. I mean, has he any suspicions? I was a little surprised, I confess, on your arrival here, not to receive a private letter from him. You must remember that he looks upon me as a personal friend.'

The silence that followed was a heavy one. Mabun's eyes were fixed upon Hari intently, but even in their steadiness they seemed to scintillate. Hari began to walk slowly up and down the room.

'Well, we shall see!' Mabun brought out in the end. 'The order for your release is a little overdue already. If it does not soon come ...'

Hari gave a brief laugh and continued his march up and down. He had no idea how long Mabun and he had been closeted together, and his eyes wandered to the door. Without waiting for a further hint Mabun rose to his feet, and briefly they arranged for a renewal of the talk next morning. Quite unaware that he was still holding Lalita's whip in his hand, he was on the point of leaving the room when Mabun laid a detaining hand on his arm.

'Are you taking that whip with you, my friend?'

Hari broke into a laugh.

'Oh, Hari! Hari!' And Mabun with a head-shake drew him firmly away from the door. 'Tell me! since your arrest you have not, I hope, had any communication with the Princess?'

Hari coloured. 'Yes. I sent her a word of warning. How could I refrain?'

'Of warning?'

'Certainly. I said: "Marry the Prince if you will, but know this ..."'

'It was rash.'

'I took every precaution.'

'You cannot even count upon her destroying your letters.'

'I think I can.'

Mabun made a gesture of impatience. 'If we are to be fellow-conspirators, my dear Hari ...'

'Fellow-conspirators is rather a strong word, isn't it, Mabun?'

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'Why do you pretend to be half-hearted? I know you to be a man of spirit.'

Hari fixed Mabun with intensity. 'What exactly are you expecting of me?'

'In the first place, discretion, circumspection.'

'And then?'

Mabun smiled and shrugged. 'Oh, merely your testimony, your testimony. Nothing more "political" than that!'

Hari paused and considered. 'I wonder,' he said reflectively, 'I wonder why you dislike the Prince so much?'

'Your wonder is not very flattering,' laughed Mabun; 'but, in point of fact, the Prince is nothing to me. I am working for the welfare of the Empire.'

Hari received this in silence.

'Akbar will die soon. The astrologers have foretold it. It is undesirable that Prince Daniyal should succeed him. Can you doubt it, Hari Khan?'

Hari shrugged. 'For my part, I don't profess to be unbiased. But this question of our future ruler is an important one; and I should have thought that a man like you, immune from personal prejudices, might well have given the preference to Daniyal. He, at any rate, has intelligence; whereas his brother is likely to set the whole Empire by the ears.'

At these words Mabun took a few steps away and surveyed Hari with eyes narrowed in an effort of the deepest deliberation. Then suddenly he began talking with extraordinary earnestness and fluency. 'I will explain. Listen to me carefully, I beg. These are my reasons for preferring Prince Salim to Daniyal. Daniyal is in league with Mobarek and what Mobarek stands for is not good. That little Persian is called a mystic' — and Mabun snapped his fingers in derision — 'but he is also a typical ecclesiastic. He has a vision of the unification of temporal and spiritual powers in this land. His mind has been dazzled by the splendours of Byzantine sacerdotalism at the height of its glory. He is an authoritarian; his ideal is a rigid hierarchy. He sees in the caste system, in the privileged position of the Brahmins, machinery ready to hand . . . and in the Emperor he finds a man endowed with the prestige, the potency, and perhaps the ambition, to give feasibility to his scheme. That is Mobarek! And if any man can make that dream of his come true, Akbar can do it. But Akbar will always be Akbar, a



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living man, an individuality, not the impersonal figure-head, the impassive symbol of an all-powerful Church. After Akbar there must be Daniyal, because Daniyal is ready to lend himself to those designs. Imagine a Holy Indian Empire with an Emperor-Pope at its head! And imagine the Emperor-Pope to be Daniyal, a debauched youth, surrounded by eunuchs and catamites; a living idol with painted cheeks who would be exhibited with ecclesiastical pomp before his prostrated subjects once or twice a year. The position would amuse Daniyal; it would appeal both to his cynicism and to his love of all that is meretricious and spectacular. The best part of his time he would spend in a seclusion of incredible magnificence, entertaining himself lightly, in the fashion of his set, with music, art, literature, and — sodomy. Everything much in his present style, but without any restraint . . . and without wanting for money.'

Hari looked at Mabun dumbly; the rush of his words had been completely overpowering. Mabun stepped back a few paces and gave him a malicious little smile.

'Before you go,' said he, 'let me make my position absolutely clear. I am a secret supporter of Prince Salim's.'

Hari's look continued to question.

'I mean,' said Mabun with another touch of impatience, 'I mean that I am plotting with Salim for Akbar's dethronement — should it prove necessary. I fear that it may, and that before long. There is the danger that Akbar will crumble the Empire to pieces in his own hands before he dies, or that at his death he will hand it over to Daniyal. Neither of these disasters shall occur if I can help it. Unless Akbar returns to his senses, unless Daniyal and Mobarek are disgraced and banished, Salim must take the throne. Now there you have my position in a nutshell; I have confessed all; I have confided in you without reserve. Please think my words over, Hari Khan, and to-morrow we will go on with our talk.'

HARI spent the remainder of that day pacing up and down the Great Terrace with bowed head or halting to stare vacant-eyed over the balustrade. At times he still felt a certain elation, even a kind of gaiety; and yet reason insisted that his position was, in reality, a most anxious one. He was not so simple as to look upon Mabun's confidences as merely flattering; no, they were not that; and still less were they reassuring. First and foremost, they provided him with a measure of Mabun's sense of power; they opened his eyes to the degree of his own entanglement.

In all this affair it was the element of entanglement that he chiefly objected to; the sense of being caught, of being pressed into the service of a cabal. Of course the fact that Daniyal was already his enemy and that he was already disposed to support Salim did materially ease the situation. But, unfortunately, it was in his character to turn obstinate at the least hint of coercion, and although Mabun had been tact and consideration personified, he found it hard to overlook the fact that Mabun had the upper hand. If he was going to work against Daniyal in favour of Salim he would do it in no other way than his own way, and by his own will, and at his own time. All his life he had stood clear of parties and factions. It seemed absurd that a trivial accident should plunge him into a life and death partisanship.

What manner of man was this Mabun who claimed him as a fellow-conspirator? The question posed itself with greater urgency than ever. To get a comprehensive view of Mabun's character, to knit all the disparate elements together into an intelligible whole: this was his task. There was perceptiveness and sensitiveness in Mabun, there was ambition (probably in excess), and, above all, there was a ruthless devotion to purpose. Of the minor egotisms, personal frailties, and petty vanities, he could find but little trace. It was as if the man had grown tired of himself as a person and preferred to be simply a machine. In his hunt for clues Hari went over everything that he had ever heard about Mabun's private life. The little there was came to this: he had started in life as a petty scribe, his quick wits had carried him rapidly upwards, intelligence and industry seemed to be the sole secret of his success. At sixteen

he had married a girl of about his own age, and she had died less than twelve months later in childbirth. This was the only chapter in his life that stood out in detachment from the rest. Not many weeks after his wife's death he had attempted suicide and for the space of one year he had walked the world like a ghost. Then suddenly all had changed; his life had resumed its flow; very soon he took another wife, and then concubines by the score; at the present time, in fact, he was reputed to keep about a dozen separate establishments and to be the father of thirty or forty children.

Now, did that history, put next to the living present, throw any illumination upon the inward life of the man? Hari was seeking desperately to get a notion of the mainspring of that existence; he wanted to know what were Mabun's underlying emotions, his compelling beliefs, and what part they played in his life. Well, perhaps he *was* able to form a sort of idea. Perhaps the plain truth was that Mabun was taking the world simply as a gymnasium in which to exercise his abounding energies. Probably it was a waste of time to look for ultimate motives, spiritual allegiances. Anyhow, taking Mabun for just what he seemed to be, Hari liked him — liked him increasingly — and his respect kept pace with his liking.

And now, to come right up to the actual issue; his co-operation was wanted by Mabun, and something quite definite in the way of co-operation. Could he bring himself to do what was wanted? Mabun considered that the evidence of his honourable friend Hari Khan would be of immense value in bringing about Daniyal's disgrace. Nor was there any fault of reasoning here. In a country where nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of every thousand were ready to perjure themselves for the price of a bowl of rice, the character, the quality of a witness, was everything. There were very few men, even in his immediate entourage, whose word Akbar would respect; and one of those few Mabun believed his friend Hari to be. Exactly. And it was, therefore, particularly unfortunate that were this same trusted and trustworthy Hari to stand up before the Emperor and speak as Mabun wished, he would be perjuring himself and bearing false witness.

That was the crux, the hidden, distracting heart of the affair. That was what had been oppressing him, holding him in a kind of semi-paralysis, from the moment that Mabun had come out with the statement that Daniyal was the victim of the accident in the wood. Hari knew it was not so. Upon seeing Daniyal again at close

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quarters he had been obliged to reject the idea quite definitely. And although Mabun's story had thrown him momentarily into a daze, as soon as his mind had cleared he had not only seen the lie for what it was, but had measured its use and its purpose. In the first place Mabun had thought it not impossible that he, Hari, might in all innocence be able to conjure up a false memory in support of a story told with such calm assurance. Failing this, however, the lie, even when detected, might, Mabun would suppose, be a very pleasant one to accept. Moreover, his dear friend Hari would, he trusted, accept it in the spirit in which it was offered — accept it, that is to say, as a tribute to his delicacy of feeling. The kind intention was to make the necessary piece of perjury as easy as possible. He hoped so to arrange things that no one — not even he himself — need ever know whether his friend Hari was wittingly or unwittingly bearing false witness. It was considerate, it was exquisitely tactful, it was just like him. The better you knew Mabun the less unpleasing did the sinuosities of his mind appear. The little man had done his best; and when he saw that his story about Daniyal had not gone down, when he saw that Hari was in danger of blurting something out, how adroitly he had pleaded for silence! That little dissertation of his about lying — it had had a hundred different meanings, but primarily it had been intended of course as a gentle nudge, as a hint, as a prayer that Hari would at least take his time to think, to consider, to weigh carefully. . . .

Yes, little by little, the elements in Mabun's character were falling into place, and with the effect of making Hari feel that the man was — in spite of so much — worthy of trust. You were not to misjudge him simply because he was considerate of your pampered conscience, of your snobbish adherence to a certain code. His own wholeheartedness, his own single-mindedness, lifted him far above all such indulgences. What he saw was the magnitude of the political issue, the great things at stake; and one had to admit that the disproportion between these and one's own small scruples was pretty large; one's own private and personal distaste for perjury was not an impressively weighty factor in the opposite balance.

When the time came for continuing his talk with Mabun, Hari had made his mind up definitely upon one point. He intended to have the truth exposed in all its nakedness; and if he had grown not a little ashamed of his scruples, he would, none the less, spread them out before Mabun's reproachful eyes. Strung up to a high pitch, he

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was starting along the passage when a messenger stopped him with a polite but hurried note begging him to defer his visit to the afternoon. The intervening hours dragged unendurably; what in the world could Mabun find worthy to take precedence of their affairs?

At last he was marching once again along the endless corridors to the suite where all his talks, excepting the last, had taken place. A servant was posted at the door; and this man, instead of admitting him, led the way farther along to the same little room as last time.

Whilst waiting for Mabun he wandered restlessly about and finally explored the curtained alcove behind which Mabun had glanced. At the back of it he found a door; and, putting his ear to it, he fancied that he heard someone moving on the other side. As he was debating whether to try the door or not, Mabun came in; and on that he emerged from behind the curtain, looking, no doubt, more than a trifle self-conscious. Mabun, on his side, seemed to him to be less composed than usual; he had the air of bringing with him harassing preoccupations. It was with a rather satirical smile that he said: 'Have no fear, Hari Khan. That door is locked, and I hold the key.'

Without further comment on either side the two men seated themselves on the divan as before; and as before Mabun took the lead. Confidently assuming that Hari was ready to follow him, he began at once to develop and elaborate his theme.

Hari tried to be patient. There could be no harm, he imagined, in letting Mabun talk as much as he liked; nevertheless, after a while, he began to grow restive, and finally he made — or tried to make — an interruption. By his air Mabun could see what was coming — that face of discomfort, that frowning and fidgeting — oh, it was clear enough! And poor Mabun, with a look of agonized supplication, went on talking faster and more urgently than ever. He refused to give up hope; when Hari broke in, he tried to drown his voice; and when Hari spoke louder, his accents grew shriller still. For a minute or more this ridiculous contest went on. It ended with a sudden extraordinary seizure of nervousness on Mabun's side; he grasped Hari by the arm; 'Less loud, my dear friend; less loud, I beg!' and his gaze fastened anxiously upon the curtain opposite. Really it seemed ridiculous that they should be exposed to any risk from eavesdroppers; and Hari exclaimed loudly in his impatience. Nevertheless, the next moment it appeared to him that the little Bengalee's face had turned an extraordinary colour. How

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was this? Had Mabun any reason to suppose . . . had his ear caught some sound . . . ?

He was still leaning forward and frowning perplexedly when the outrageous, the unbelievable thing happened. From behind the curtain there resounded the clatter of a piece of furniture overturned, and this was followed by the mutter of an oath.

Hari drew back; he and Mabun looked at one another; there was silence. Two or three seconds passed thus. Then another oath sounded, and this time it rang out with the violence of passion let loose; the curtain was viciously pulled aside, and a tall, gaunt man lurched into the room. This person's appearance — to say nothing of the mode of his apparition — was somewhat alarming and at the same time somewhat ridiculous. From between his eyelids, much inflamed by drink, his small, wild eyes shone with the light of fury. 'Enough!' he shouted out hoarsely. 'Chatter, chatter, chatter! By Shaitan, you are both accursed!'

Hari and Mabun had instinctively sprung to their feet; and Mabun, who a moment ago had been tense and livid, now began dancing up and down from the ferment of his emotions. But to speak he had no chance; for the newcomer, sweeping the glare of his frenzied exasperation from the one to the other in turn, continued to hold the field with the splutter and bellow of his rage.

In these moments it dawned upon Hari who he was. It was Salim. Impossible as it seemed, it must be Salim. Strangely accoutred (no doubt he considered himself in disguise), half drunk, and bursting with ineffective irritation, he nevertheless managed to offer an imperious, if not a wholly dignified, figure. Staring, Hari began to revive a definite memory of those features; and when he glanced round at Mabun for confirmation, the latter, throwing out his hand in a gesture of despair, said in a strangled voice: 'His Royal Highness Prince Salim'.

At this Hari saluted with all due ceremony; and Salim, letting himself drop heavily down upon a chair made acknowledgment with a scowl.

'Permit me . . .' began Mabun. 'If only Your Royal Highness will deign . . .'

'Sit down, monkey!' roared Salim. 'Haven't you chattered enough already? Sit down and be quiet! Merciful Allah!' and he went on cursing through his beard.

Mabun obeyed, but Hari remained standing.

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'Sit you down, too, Hari Khan,' Salim growled out after a pause. 'I am coming to business with you. You'll find me a different customer. Yes — and now that you are talking to *me*, perhaps you will talk better sense.'

Hari inclined his head. 'I will do my best, Your Royal Highness.'

Salim grunted. The tone of this somewhat puzzled him, for he was accustomed to browbeating; he liked to play the bully, and although his bark was notoriously worse than his bite, it was not often that anyone dared to stand up to him.

'Look you! I am tired of hair-splitting. I am going to come straight to the point. We are talking about that accident in the wood. You recognized my brother well enough, and that's an end of it. I advise you not to try my patience too far, Hari Khan.'

'I beg Your Royal Highness's pardon, but . . .'

'Nonsense!' shouted Salim, mightily slapping his thigh.

Hari smiled and kept silence. He had recovered his composure, and although his spirit was roused, he had his temper well under control. As for Salim, if he, too, kept silence for a minute, it was because his accumulated irritation was simmering and seething without finding an adequate vent.

'You know who I am,' he cried out at last, 'so take warning! Collect your wits, my good fellow, before it is too late. I know you for the scoundrel you are. I hold your life in my hand. What I say I say, Hari Khan. You recognized my brother, Prince Daniyal. If you deny it, you lie. And then . . .'

Swaying about on his seat, he let his small eyes, glittering wickedly, finish his sentence for him.

'Again I beg Your Royal Highness's pardon,' said Hari. 'I think you must have heard me just now, when I was saying — or trying to say — to Mabun Das . . .'

'Permit me! One moment!' interjected Mabun, springing in despair from the divan. 'It is no use going back over old ground. No, no! Let us start afresh, let us forget! The subject must be approached from a new angle. To be sure, there is some way out of the difficulty. Only let us leave it until to-morrow. A little time for reflection, a little patience, a little . . .'

'A little money!' broke in Salim with a snarl. 'The fellow wants money, I suppose, or honours — or Allah alone knows what? Otherwise he must be stark staring mad.'

So speaking he turned upon Hari a look that was intended to be

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offensive — and so, indeed, it was. A little of Hari's temper slipped past his self-control; a slight flush mounted.

'Up to now,' he pronounced deliberately, 'the trouble has been that I could not honestly identify the man, who, Your Royal Highness declares, was Prince Daniyal; but now . . .'

At these words a look of blank horror spread over Mabun's face, and Salim — almost unable to believe his ears — leant forward with a strange growl.

'Well, now,' continued Hari, 'I really believe I can identify that man with some confidence. It was Your Royal Highness himself.'

Salim made a noise in his throat; and his hand fumbled after his dagger. 'Idiot!' he brought out, half rising from his seat. 'Idiot and . . .'

Hari sat firm and fixed him with a level look. For two or three seconds he felt that he had been an idiot indeed. Salim, every inch a swashbuckler, swayed now forwards, now backwards, and perhaps it really was nothing more than chance that finally dropped him backwards into his chair again. With a bark of forced laughter he flung out a hand: 'Look at him!' he called to the quivering Mabun; 'Hark at him!' and he shook his fist. 'That — that is the man you said would be of use!'

Mabun appeared to have exhausted all his emotions. 'In any case,' he said dully, 'Hari Khan is a sympathizer, I am prepared to answer for him personally.'

Salim shut his eyes for a few moments and pursed his lips. When he raised his lids again it was to study Hari with a resentful, baffled curiosity. 'The fellow really seems to be a lunatic, a half-wit!' he commented to himself. 'What does he want? How does he hope to save his wretched skin?' Suddenly he swung round at Mabun, thrusting his face at him with a sneer. 'You answer for him, do you? Well, I should advise you to take care. What if I were to inform the Emperor about his little intrigues? What would my father have to say about that, eh? Or my brother either, for that matter? He and his Princess! He and his Princess! And yet — look at him! He has the impertinence to sit there and contradict me. Bah! Get me some wine, Mabun Das. All this talk has parched my throat; — besides, it is my hour.'

Mabun got up, hesitated for a moment, and then disappeared through the alcove into a room beyond.

'You will find the doors all unlocked,' Salim called after him,



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chuckling. 'And next time you try to shut me in . . . ' He slapped both his thighs, laughed, and turning to Hari — 'A good little man in his way, but fussy! Thinks he can treat me like a child. He loses his nerve, you know; it is always the same story, every time I pay him a visit. But I come disguised, as you see. I know what I'm doing. It wouldn't do for my father to catch me, that's true enough. Not that I should get much more than a scolding, but poor Mabun would be thrown to the elephants. Oh, yes, he's on tenterhooks, I can tell you!'

Hari smiled politely and remained silent. Salim, who was evidently craving for his wine, pressed his hands wearily over his eyeballs and blew out his lips. 'This is the hour at which I allow myself five cups,' he informed Hari. 'Five cups and no more.'

'Your Royal Highness is temperate,' returned Hari pleasantly.

'My brother Daniyal drinks in secret. Did you know that? You mark my words, he will end like poor Murad.'

Hari found nothing to reply, and after a moment Salim began humming to himself. It was fairly evident that his abstraction was feigned.

'By the way, Hari Khan,' he said all at once, 'there is something I have been meaning to ask you. What has become of that girl Gunevati?' He paused, then leant forward, and after sending a glance in the direction of the alcove, said in a lowered voice: 'If you want to do me a service, Hari Khan, you will find that girl and send her over to me at Allahabad. This is between you and me, mind you; for Mabun Das, although a good little fellow in his way, is no use in an affair of this kind. I tell you he is as nervous as a cat . . . always afraid of betrayal. He thinks the girl is untrustworthy . . . tells me he has hunted everywhere and can't find her. Says she has disappeared — been murdered! All lies, of course! Curse him, I always know when he's lying to me. But if you will find that girl, Hari Khan, I will overlook all your damned impertinence. Do you see?' With these last words he got up, went and peeped cautiously behind the curtain and tiptoed back. Giving Hari a grin and a wink: 'Just coming!' he whispered.

When Mabun reappeared, it was with a wine-jug and some glasses. Salim was sprawling in his chair again and humming abstractedly to himself. As soon as the jug had been set down he seized it and poured out a glassful. 'Good stuff!' said he, and after tossing off three glasses in quick succession he looked around him with

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benignity. 'This is what my royal father used to drink when he was my age — only he drank twice as much. We are very much alike, he and I. I love him. And his love for me is beyond all bounds. But there it is! He is old. He has lost his wits and persecutes true believers. You, Hari Khan,' and he raised his finger at Hari, 'you, a good Moslem, will understand that my duty towards Islam comes first. And after that comes my duty to the Empire. To the Empire! — why, even this unbelieving dog, Mabun Das, is able to understand that. Allah and the Empire! It is for them I strive. It is for them I am here now; I risk my life — but what of that? It is all done gladly, gladly!'

Another half-hour slipped by while he continued in much the same vein, and in the meantime seven glasses, as Hari counted, went down his throat, although he repeatedly declared that he was taking but five. Mabun sat opposite, very watchful and collected, licking his lips from time to time like one who has many words to repress. As for Hari, he was longing to take himself off, and directly a suitable occasion arose, he exchanged glances with Mabun and got up. Salim, who by now was considerably fuddled, made no attempt to detain him, and his withdrawal was ceremonious but rapid.

ON his way back to his room Hari could not help smiling broadly to himself. Poor Mabun! How many and various were the difficulties he had to contend with! All this multifarious human material — what foolish, mulish stuff it was! For a man who knew his own mind, saw his goal, and had the will, the wits, and the heart, to make for it — for such a man what a spectacle his common fellow-creatures must provide! Ordinary human nature, compact of inconsistencies and prejudices, inconstancies and irrelevancies — what must it appear in his eyes! And what a life's task to be continually humouring, cajoling, and threatening, the infinite waywardness of mankind! No wonder Mabun's hands fluttered, no wonder his eyebrows sometimes twitched! A hundred times a day no doubt he had to remind himself that just this was his business: to compensate with his own brains for the stupidity of others, to make up with his own care for another's carelessness, with his own foresight for another's short-sightedness, with his own untiring industry for the almost universal indolence of men. It was his business, day in, day out, to manipulate a thousand fragile threads and never let one snap, to pick his way through mazes of intricate detail and never lose his grasp, to be tripped up by every form of sublunary folly and never relax his smile.

Besides, this was to say nothing of the freakishness of blind chance. It could only be by some quite incalculable piece of ill-luck that this last episode had occurred. But was the mischance really a serious one for anybody concerned? His own feelings, Hari reflected, remained exactly the same. He was far from harbouring any resentment against Salim. The Prince was a perfect specimen of a boor; but that he had always known. If Mabun was feeling distressed and apologetic, he must take haste to comfort him. His conscience still sided with Mabun; and if he obeyed it, the fact that Salim would think he was intimidated or actuated by self-interest, ought not to matter to him at all. Salim's opinion of one was not a thing to be considered.

Towards sunset on the same day, as he was sitting with Narsing on the terrace, Mabun made his appearance. There was no change in his demeanour, his step was as brisk and light as ever; he joined

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in the conversation with all his habitual deftness and urbanity. In the course of the last three weeks it had become abundantly evident that Narsing was seriously out of health. It was his habit now to spend many hours upon a couch in a corner of the terrace; but as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon he would drag himself wearily indoors. On this occasion, no sooner had he withdrawn than Mabun turned upon Hari a rueful, sardonic regard. Together they went and leaned over the balustrade; and after gathering reassurance from the few words that Hari let fall, Mabun made a rapid plunge to the heart of his subject. It was Salim he now had to talk about.

‘Yes, my dear Hari,’ he was presently explaining, ‘Salim’s passion for Gunevati, although less than two months old, introduces another tiresome element into the situation. He became completely infatuated after the last meeting of the fraternity — a meeting that took place only a few days before Gokal carried the girl off to the Hills. Since then Salim has been clamouring for her and giving me a lot of trouble. Of course I have the best reasons in the world for disapproving of this connection. Just consider what Gunevati is! Could anyone be more dangerous? Were Salim to take her into his harem, Daniyal’s spies would begin ferreting into her history and it would not be long before Daniyal would be in a position to bring against Salim just those accusations that we are arranging to bring against *him*. But you have seen for yourself what Salim is like! His demand for Gunevati is in character with the rest of his behaviour. My dear Hari, these visits of his to Agra in disguise! This hiding in the palace! These religious orgies in that hunting-box under his father’s very nose! All these are follies that imperil the cause and drive me to the verge of distraction. And then he persists in trying to bribe or bully me into giving up to him a part of his father’s treasure lying in these vaults. In fact that was his object when he made the first of these secret visits, which are the curse of my life. Oh, I assure you, Salim is a very unwelcome guest here! But what can I do? He sends word that he is coming; he comes; and I have no choice but to take him in.’

Mabun’s looks were really pathetic; he threw out his hands helplessly; but the pause he made was not a long one. ‘Thank God, my dear Hari, I find in you a man of common sense. I hope you understand that ever since I got to know you (I mean when you were staying here two or three months ago) I have been acting as

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your friend. It was a lucky chance that threw us together at that time, for it was in those weeks that Gunevati betrayed you to Salim, who at once requested me to put you out of the way for fear lest you might have recognized him in the wood and be minded to denounce him. I had to convince Salim that you yourself were too heavily compromised to be dangerous, and I pointed out at the same time how useful you might be in lending weight to an accusation against Daniyal.'

Here Mabun paused and seemed to be waiting.

'So, even at that time,' said Hari, 'you already had your designs.'

'Exactly!' smiled Mabun, 'and now I am coming to that. Daniyal has no alibi, because he was secretly closeted with me at the very time that the accident in the wood took place. He was successfully persuading me to yield to him what I have consistently refused to Salim — a part of his father's treasure. And presently, my dear Hari, you will see why.'

An hour had already gone by, but the evening was warm and still, and accordingly they arranged to sup on the terrace together. During the meal the talk turned on indifferent topics, and Hari was glad of the opportunity for a little further reflection. No sooner had the servants withdrawn, however, than Mabun started off again.

'My dear Hari, there must be a great deal in my scheme which still remains ambiguous to you. A great deal, too, that sounds almost fantastical. Now let me anticipate your objections. You are not tired? You are prepared to listen a little longer? That is excellent!' And for the next three hours Mabun's talk flowed on with hardly a single break. His discourse opened with an analysis of Akbar's relationship to his sons. Salim, in spite of all his insubordination, was still the favourite; there was a natural bond of affection between these two, whereas of Daniyal the Emperor had no understanding whatever. Daniyal was cunning, pliant, outwardly full of respect, and exceedingly adroit in keeping his father in ignorance of his true character and disposition. Through his friends, notably through Mobarek, he instilled into the Emperor a false picture of himself, and at the same time, naturally enough, everything was done to blacken the character of Salim. Of his two sons Akbar really knew little but what came to him through the mouths of others; it was a situation that gave intrigue its fullest scope, and unless the question of the succession were to be resolved by force of arms, the envenomed arts of calumny and intrigue would be paramount up to the very end.

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The battle-ground was the mind of Akbar, and the peculiarities of that mind conditioned the tactics to be employed. 'Listen to me very carefully, my dear Hari, for here I begin to deal with what is probably your first and most obvious objection to my scheme. "Why," you ask, "why go to the pains of bringing up against Daniyal a charge which is comparatively trivial and completely false, when there are doubtless many weighty and true offences that might be preferred against him?" Well, let us examine the offences that you have in mind and let us see how Akbar would regard them. In the first place, there is the taking of human life. But this, when done by emperors — and what I say holds good for royal princes as well — goes by the name of secret execution, and is regarded, if not as actually permissible, at any rate as excusable. Akbar, who has resorted to secret execution on many occasions himself, would certainly not be roused to any great anger against Daniyal on this score. Consider next the charges of robbery and blackmail. Those actions when committed by princes go by the names of forced loans and private fines. It is quite true, of course, that Daniyal is in the habit of extorting enormous sums from his friends by threatening to charge them with conspiring with Salim, but Akbar must already be aware of this, and he certainly would not make it a cause of quarrel with Daniyal; anything, in his opinion, being preferable in a son to the asking of money from his father. There remains, then, the suggestion, my dear Hari, that Daniyal should be arraigned for the form of immorality to which he is actually addicted. But here again the proposal will not bear examination, for, although it is quite true that Akbar would object very strongly to Daniyal's vices were he to see them as they are, there is not the smallest chance of his doing so. In his mind sodomy is associated with stories of youthful Greek heroes bound together in death-defying friendship; it reminds him, too, of his own early days and of rough, manly loves amongst the young warriors of the Steppes. Sodomy, in his view of it, is at the furthest possible remove from effeminacy or perversion. It is an excess of virility; it is merely the young fighter's peccadillo. Then, too, how could Akbar, even if he were so minded, publicly take exception to sodomy? Why, such an attitude would be regarded by those of his own race as an insult not only to the country of his birth but to the memory of his illustrious ancestors. And in this country, too, amongst us Hindus, sodomy, you must remember, ranks only in the fourth degree of misdoing, it takes an inconspicuous place

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with "dissimulation, looking disrespectfully at a Brahmin, and smelling any spirituous liquor, or anything extremely fetid and unfit to be smelt". No, my friend, if you consider my scheme far-fetched and my way of going to work devious and unpractical, you are falling into a common error. One cannot build straight roads in the country of the human mind. You must not regard your own standards and opinions as universal. We must take Akbar as we find him. We cannot make him see Daniyal through *our* eyes; to reach our ends we must paint Daniyal in colours that will make him odious in *his* eyes, in the eyes of the actual living Akbar.'

'This being conceded,' Mabun went on, 'the merits of my scheme become patent. For Akbar all offences fall into two categories; offences against God, and offences against himself; and the matter is again simplified by the fact that in his mind these categories very largely overlap. He has always looked upon a king as "a shadow of God", and recently he has made the belief, that he is the actual representative of God on earth, the corner-stone of his new religion. Well then! the situation speaks for itself. In accepting one of the highest offices in the new priesthood Daniyal has played into our hands. If we can show that at the very time when he was making these public professions he was also indulging in secret ceremonial orgies as a member of one of the sects that Akbar holds in greatest detestation, if we can do this, Hari Khan, then Daniyal is lost.'

After a few moments of impressive silence Mabun began again. 'Akbar is about to preside over another Court of Justice; he will sit in judgment upon those accused of offences of this sort, and he has sworn an oath not to consider rank, dignity, or position. Now, I have arranged that his investigations shall show that the thing he hates is not only in the ranks of the base-born but close to the Throne itself. Thus, step by step, and in circumstances of the greatest publicity, he will be led on in the direction of Daniyal, until at last an indictment becomes inevitable. Then, and not till then, Gunevati and her associates will be produced, and they will say what I have ordered them to say, because their lives depend upon it. Someone, no doubt, will raise his voice to protest against taking the testimony of the base-born against the word of a prince, but that objection will be met by the call that I shall make upon you.'

Hari was silent, and perhaps it was to prevent the utterance of the protestations that he saw gathering behind his frowning brows that Mabun ran hastily on into speech again. 'The evidences against

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Daniyal will not only be unimpeachable, but various. There will be found in Gunevati's possession jewels traceable to him, and amongst these Akbar will recognize some as belonging to his own treasure. Offences against his purse, as you know, drive the Emperor to madness. In hot haste he will order my arrest and examine into the extent of his losses. At this juncture my life will be in danger, for his messengers will find a part of the treasure gone. But I shall recover it for him; my agents will find it in the cellars of Daniyal's palace, and then . . .' At this point Mabun waved his hand airily, smiled and fell into silence.

The look of gloom upon Hari's face did not seem to be lifting. 'I am afraid I am wearying you,' Mabun said softly. 'Why should I trouble you with details? My own object is to convince you that I have been careful and painstaking in my arrangements.'

With this he ceased and remained quiet, but obviously not without great effort. While his lips remained closed, his eyes dwelt upon Hari's face with an eloquent anxiety. 'Can you refuse,' they seemed to say, 'the little thing I ask, when I have already given — and am still ready to give — so much?'

Hari sighed, brushed his face over with his hands, and even groaned aloud. These methods were natural and proper to Mabun; in Mabun they were not unbecoming. A born intriguer, and conscious of the excellence of his cause, he could go forward dauntless and unashamed. Besides, he was the leader; his was the detached intelligence — impersonal, disinterested, manipulating its instruments. But what of the wretched tools themselves, and in particular that base instrument, Hari Khan? Allah! What a sorry charge was being laid upon him! Could he ever humble himself sufficiently to play his allotted part?

At last, after having left Mabun's side and taken one or two moody turns up and down the terrace, he came back and said: 'Would to God I had killed Daniyal on the night of the banquet! Would to God Salim had persuaded you to destroy me out of hand! I tell you, Mabun, those courses would have suited me better than this. I can give you no promises, no assurances of any kind. I detest public affairs. Your machinations weary me. I hope I may succeed in persuading myself to do as you wish, and that is all I can say.'

Mabun laughed gently and grasped him confidently by the arm. 'Say no more, my dear Hari Khan. I shall never forgive myself if you continue to fret. No, no, you must on no account



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worry. I dare say we shall manage well enough by ourselves — Salim and Gunevati and I.' At the conjunction of these names he laughed merrily. 'If I think you are a little foolish, that doesn't prevent me from entering into your feelings with deep sympathy.'

Hari faced round and looked him up and down with an eye that was full of liking. Mabun was all smiles and gentle mockery now, but even so, one could detect the fire and fixity of his purpose behind. Mabun against Daniyal! The mongoose against the cobra! Yes, he liked this little mongoose well. And how vividly he could visualize the nimble, gallant little creature, coat bristling, eyes like sparks, crouching tensely for a spring at its coiled and watchful enemy.

He was silent, until, after a while, his thoughts took another turn 'Mabun!' he cried, 'not many days ago I was almost ready to renounce the world altogether, and that was before you had begun to plague me!'

The look of amusement upon Mabun's face deepened. 'I don't see you in a cloister yet awhile, my friend.'

Hari looked up into the starless, moonless sky. Heavy clouds could be felt moving across it. A few big drops of rain splashed upon the marble flags.

'No, perhaps a cave in some mountain side would be better.' He smiled, and then went on inconsequently. 'If a man like Akbar is to be cast aside after a few years like a worn-out shoe, what are the uses of ambition, energy, and valour?'

Mabun emitted a long-drawn sighing breath. 'God grant that Daniyal and Mobarek may fall and that Akbar will continue to reign for many a long year. Is not that precisely my object? Is it not *that* I am working for?'

'But Salim — in his impatience for the throne . . .'

'Bah!' and Mabun snapped his fingers. 'If necessary, I would betray him into his father's hands. No harm would result.'

Hari threw up his head and laughed. 'Forgive me, Mabun, but in my ears all this sounds a little glib. History does not take its shape like a clay pot — even when the potter is Mabun Das.'

'I do not pretend to omnipotence — but I am practical.'

'Too practical. Your ends fall within the range of man's vision. The world is not governed by men with their definite ends, but by fate with its unintelligible purpose.'

'Unintelligible indeed!' scoffed Mabun, but with the greatest gentleness.

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Hari continued unabashed. 'If the day ever arrives when men gain control of their worldly courses, that will be a sign that the end of the world is at hand. It will mean that men have taken the wrong turning and committed spiritual suicide without even suspecting it. Having encompassed their limited perfection, there will not be one human being left whose life is worth preserving, and God's thumb will descend and crush the whole.'

'I seem to be assuming the mantle of the prophet,' he went on after a pause. 'I must have borrowed it from Narsing, who surprised me this afternoon with many solemn utterances. He maintained that Akbar, in spite of all his follies, was the fountain of our spiritual life in this age. He prophesied that after Akbar's death the Empire would crumble into corruption. I listened respectfully.'

They were both standing by the balustrade, and Mabun's eyes continued to look steadily out into the thick, sultry darkness.

'Poor Narsing!'

'Is he so foolish?'

'I mean: he is dying,' Mabun replied softly. 'And for him death is hard.'

'Dying? Are you sure of it?'

'Quite sure. I know his disease. He did not tell you that he was dying — no? Nevertheless, he knows it as well as I, only he will not accept the truth.'

Hari turned away from Mabun, and as he once more fronted the darkness Narsing's recent looks and words floated back into his mind invested with new and pathetic shades of meaning. When he next spoke it was to inquire whether Narsing would live long enough to see Akbar again on the latter's return to Fatehpur-Sikri.

Mabun shook his head doubtfully, and then fixed upon Hari a look which the latter was at a loss to understand.

'Akbar will never return to Fatehpur-Sikri. I do not mean that he, too, is to die. What I mean is that Fatehpur-Sikri is already dead.'

Puzzled, Hari knitted his brows.

'It is so,' continued Mabun, now again gazing tranquilly into the night. 'Fatehpur-Sikri is as dead as if the grass were already growing among its stones. In fact, grass *has* already sprouted in the pavement of the Great Court; I myself saw it when I went there a few days ago.'

'No city should ever have been built upon that spot,' he continued after a pause. 'Akbar chose it because it had been the abode of the saint who promised him the birth of a son. Nevertheless' — and

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Mabun's inflection was very delicate — 'Nevertheless, it was an ill-chosen site. The reservoirs upon which Fatehpur-Sikri depended have all cracked; the water has escaped; the ground in that region is brittle and hollow; and now the city is doomed. Of course it is being given out that all can be made good, but — I tell you this in confidence, Hari Khan — that is absolutely untrue. It is impossible to construct reservoirs on such ground. Waterless the city will remain. Soon it will be a ruin.'

Hari made no reply. With his eyes turned in the direction of Fatehpur-Sikri he followed the memories that drifted across his mind.

After a pause of some length Mabun straightened himself, gave a smile and said: 'I hope I have not depressed you, my friend? Alas, the truth is the truth, reality is reality, and there is no escaping it. At least,' he corrected himself, 'there is no escape for a man like you.'

Hari gave a laugh, and together they strolled towards the entrance arch, for it was time to part.

'What do you mean by reality, my dear Mabun?'

'Oh, I am no philosopher. By reality I mean Maya — the phenomenal world, Illusion, if you please to call it so. But for us illusion alone exists; we live in it; it is our life; let us accept it! Hari Khan, if there is a God, it is our Hindoo God — Shiva, the dancing God — Shiva, the sportive God, who out of the super-abundance of his energies has created the world for his play. Do not be depressed. After Akbar another will arise. Individuals are nothing. Shiva dances on!'

It was late that night before sleep put an end to Hari's meditations, which were of a gloomy cast, being chiefly concerned with the vanity of earthly ambitions and desires. In the darkness of his room he saw again the soft, silent blossoms of light that had unfolded upon the sky-line over Fatehpur-Sikri five months ago; and in the great span of the ages the blossoming of empires seemed scarcely less brief. Then, too, there was poor Narsing, upon whom his thoughts lingered with a more intimate melancholy. He wished he could resemble little Mabun, who knew how to watch time's flight unregretfully and without awe.

When he awoke the next morning, however, his disposition had entirely changed. It was in a spirit of ribald indifference that he regarded the fate of Fatehpur-Sikri, and thinking of Narsing he said: 'At the age of sixty a man has lived long enough. It is death no less than birth that keeps the world fresh and young. There must not be too many old eyes to look at it.'

He was taking his first turn upon the terrace when two letters arrived; one was from Mabun and the other was handed to him by a messenger who came direct from Amar. Tearing open Mabun's letter first, he learnt with a surge of thankfulness that the order for his release had arrived. This matter, as he now realized, had been weighing upon him more heavily than he had cared to admit. Amar's letter was less cheerful. That the old Ranee had died he was quite prepared to learn, but Amar went on to say that his father remained so stricken by her death that he had found it impossible to leave him. He had, accordingly, written to Sita to suggest that she should join him at Ravi; but Sita had replied with the distressing news that Gokal was dangerously ill and that to leave him all alone was not to be thought of. 'Since then, however,' Amar went on, 'I have heard that the worst is over, and by the time you get this letter Sita will be on her way to me, bringing Gokal with her. He is still very weak, I fear, but we are all agreed that the change of scene may hasten his recovery. A little while ago, when he thought he was dying, the idea that you were a prisoner and unable to come to him was a burden upon his mind. Now that you are free to come and

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go as you please, you will, I am sure, wish to visit him here; for, although out of danger, he is by no means himself again.'

Hari read this letter over several times. Then, without being unduly perturbed — for, after all, Amar said that Gokal was on the road to recovery — he determined upon an immediate departure. He was glad that his discussions with Mabun would be cut short; glad, too, that he would be spared another meeting with Salim. The thought that Sita would be at Ravi he did not dare to dwell on; but it was in the most joyful mood that he made ready for the journey.

Although Amar's letter had provided him with a good reason for sudden departure, he was a little nervous of what Mabun might find to say; but the latter raised no difficulty. On the contrary he was helpful in providing horses and equipment, so that at noon Hari was ready to set off.

Great was his satisfaction at putting Agra behind him. While his horse ambled along over the wide, open country, he gazed about with continuous delight. The road was lively with village folk, for the rains had just passed by, and a mild sun was drawing up the moisture from the rice-fields that glittered through swathes of white mist.

Weary of himself and his personal affairs, every detail of the outward scene was pleasant to him. With his freedom he had regained a sense of leisure, and this remained with him during the whole of the journey. On the tenth day he reached the mouth of the little valley of Ravi. The evening light was behind him as he gazed over the familiar water-meadows towards the distant roof of the old Rajah's house. It was flushed by the sun when he first caught sight of it, and stood bright against its background of trees. There was an exquisite freshness in the air, a smell of wet grass and the bell-like tinkle of the small green marsh-frog. A flock of wild duck eddied up from the reeds a few yards away, flew round in a circle, and settled down again. Their movement lent an even greater tranquillity to the scene, and he dropped the reins of his horse, letting it wander here and there cropping the rich grass. So deeply did this valley stir his emotions that he was seized with the impulse to turn round and fly from it. He was reminded of the old Ranee who had died, and for some reason that he could not understand he thought of the dead with envy. What greater blessing could any man look for than to fade out of individuality into the wide peace of such a scene as this? What could be better than to feel the knot of selfhood

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loosen and one's spirit flowing over those luminous spaces between the tranquil level of the earth and the brightening stars? Ah! then would one learn what it was to breathe, not with the quick, hot breath of humanity, but with the long, slow rhythm of the earth herself.

As he rode forward again he noticed a change in the landscape; Prince Daniyal's encampment had been transferred to the other side of the lake and in its place there stood a humbler group of tents, presumably Gokal's. On arriving, it was to them that he directed his steps, and very soon he came upon Gokal himself lying upon a couch in the shade of a great tree.

Anxiously did he scan his friend's features and it seemed to him that they had not only grown thinner but acquired a new sternness of cast. The impression made upon him in the first hour of their intercourse was that Gokal was wrapped in a profound calm, but as the evening wore on he saw that this calm was unnatural — or, rather, that it covered a feverish unrest.

In its main outlines the story that Gokal had to tell was simple enough. It was barely three months ago, as Hari now remembered, that he had jokingly warned him of what might easily happen if he persisted in keeping Gunevati by his side. But Gokal had paid little heed at the time, and later, as his infatuation deepened, he had become still more thoughtless. If he continued to see the girl as she was, he never drew the practical conclusions, never anticipated the probable results in life as it went on from day to day. Because her smiles were always ready, because she had the indolence of an animal and never seemed to notice time slipping by, he imagined that all the desires of her nature were fulfilled. Why should she grow bored, when she could amuse herself the whole day long with the tinting of her lips and eyelashes, or the trying on of this dress and that? Was she not enjoying comforts and luxuries that she had never dreamed of before? She appeared to be without ambition; and it was not for a long time that she gave a thought to money, wanting only to gratify her small, passing whims when they came. Later on, when she began to value an ornament for what it was worth, Gokal paid no heed to the change. He did not notice that after a day or two her costlier adornments would be discarded and were never to be seen again. He missed the significance of the fact that at this time, too, she became variable in her moods. The fits of petulance that alternated with her childlike gaiety only made her more

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attractive in his eyes. Thus it went on, until one day, not long after his evening meal, he was seized with violent sickness. The sickness persisted; his condition grew worse and worse, and finally he fell into a coma. In the early morning Sita received a message from his frightened servants to say that their master was nearly dead. She hurried to his side, and found him unconscious, with a pulse that could hardly be felt. By great good fortune it shot into her mind that there was an old herb-woman living in the neighbourhood. The woman was summoned, she got to work, and after four hours of her ministrations Gokal was out of danger. His first inquiries were after Gunevati; where was she? had she been stricken down in a similar fashion? If not, how came it that she was not at his side?

Courageously Sita decided to take upon herself the dismal task of telling him that Gunevati had mysteriously disappeared. She and Gokal had been in each other's company much more frequently since the departure of Hari and Amar. She had become completely tolerant of his infatuation, and although Gunevati was never mentioned between them, he knew well enough what her attitude was. It was thus from the standing of a friendship which had become very close that she spoke out and broke the news. For a minute or more there was complete silence, while Gokal looked at her with an uncomprehending stare. Then, gradually, as his mind adjusted itself, a faint flush coloured his ashen cheeks, and at length letting his lids sink he turned his head away. Not until two days later did Gunevati's name pass his lips, and then it was to ask if Sita would mind looking in the girl's room to see if any letters or papers throwing light on her departure had been left behind. Sita found paints, powders, and dresses, all thrown about; the room was in confusion, but no papers were to be seen.

On a broad general view Gunevati's behaviour was intelligible enough; but the case, when looked into more closely, presented certain rather mysterious characters. A plan had certainly been made out beforehand and with the aid of abettors from outside. This much Sita saw clearly; but for her part she certainly had no inclination to probe deeper, nor did Gokal express any wish (he certainly lacked the means) to set regular investigations on foot.

For nearly a fortnight his physical prostration was complete. Later, as his strength returned, he seemed to be trying to forget; and it was his greatest pleasure to listen while Sita read aloud to him. In the talks that followed from this reading their intimacy sank its

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roots deeper still. Sita found herself opening her heart to him as she had never done to anyone before. One day she confessed that she no longer loved Amar. It was true that he remained her dearest friend upon earth: 'But friendship' — she said it with a sigh — 'is not the same as love. Amar,' she went on, 'has withdrawn his heart from the world. I am left behind, but I do not complain, because I know that he must follow his Path. Love to him does not mean what it means to me, and I truly believe that this difference in our ideals puts us further apart than if he were actually in love with somebody else.'

Gokal looked grave when he heard this. It would be the saddest thing imaginable, he reflected, if Sita and Amar were to allow a real coldness to settle between them now. Unless they were to part with a perfect understanding on both sides, how could they bear to part at all? In their separation each would be haunted by remorseful thoughts. Nothing more tormenting for her nor more distracting for him could be conceived; his progress would be fatally impeded; and she, guessing it, would feel in great measure responsible. The dread of such a calamity Gokal might have dismissed as fanciful, had not Sita's words made him feel the prick of another sharper anxiety. He asked himself — and not for the first time — whether Sita and Hari might not be in danger of falling in love. Hitherto he had taken reassurance from the openness with which she would talk about both Hari and Amar; she seemed to have nothing to hide. And now, one day, by way of a test, he told her that in a letter written from Ravi, Hari had declared that he was growing weary of the world and that when he next went back to his own country, it would be to immerse himself in the study of Buddhist philosophy. Sita took a moment's thought, then she smiled and said: 'That only shows that Hari does not yet understand himself. This world will always be real to him; he finds value in the actual moment. His character in this respect is very different from Amar's.' And then, when Gokal pressed her: Amar, she went on to say, was more conscious of the past and future than of the present itself. Amar was concentrated upon what was to come, and to that extent even his most unselfish actions were interested, for they were steps on his way to his goal. Hari's very egotism had a disinterested quality, which it took from the fact that he was at the mercy of emotions that were not ruled by his individual will. 'I have that in me which deeply sympathizes with Amar,' she concluded rather helplessly, 'but another part of me rebels against him.'



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Never weary of following thy desire and vex not thy heart while thou sojournest upon earth. It is not given to man to carry his possessions with him. None that have gone have ever returned. Tears cannot refresh the heart of him who lieth in the grave. Therefore do thou make holiday and have no care.” ’

‘Yes; that is the first word in wisdom,’ replied Sita, smiling, ‘but Gokal, is it the last?’

On this afternoon, as it so happened, he was sensible of an undercurrent of peace, so after a moment he returned her smile and went on: ‘Do you remember, I once said that the riddle of the universe would be solved only when men had reached a state of consciousness in which the riddle, as such, did not exist? Well; you might say to me now that the beauty in life would be triumphant, if men had the eyes to see it. Could they but see around them the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, that grace would be there. You love the world of appearances because it is the world of poetry, and it is possible that you are justified. It may be intended that after the ascent into communion with the One there should be a descent once more to the Many — but with the knowledge of Oneness retained. This is the doctrine of Plotinus and of Dionysius the Areopagite.’

These days came to an end when Gokal was well enough to make the journey to Ravi. He seemed to bear the discomforts of travel well enough, but on his arrival he suffered a relapse, and then he ceased to reproach himself for having hinted to Amar by letter that nothing would please him better than that Hari should return.

THAT night Hari and Gokal sat up to a late hour watching the moon spread its light over the lake. The evergreen oak under which they sat stood upon a small promontory and threw the shadow of its dark, thick foliage on to the silvered water. A light breeze was blowing from the opposite shore; it brought with it a just perceptible strain of music that came from Daniyal's encampment. One could almost believe the old legend that moonlight playing upon water once made a harmony audible to Lakshmi's ear. In the long pauses that fell between them the two friends felt that the bond of their union was close indeed. They shrank from spoiling the beauty of this hour with difficult and painful topics.

To-morrow, thought Hari, would be soon enough to tell the story of Salim's passion for Gunevati. Unfortunately, to withhold this intelligence altogether was out of the question, if only on account of the light it shed on the mystery of her disappearance. It looked more than probable that the Prince's agents had taken a hand in her flight and had carried her off to their master's palace in Allahabad. On his side Gokal was thinking that he must not delay too long in speaking to Hari about Amar and Sita; he would tell him how anxious he was that their approaching separation should not be marred by any failure of understanding and sympathy. Hari would be quick to take this as an admonition, if anything of that nature was needed.

It was after midnight when they parted, Hari betaking himself to a tent that Gokal had prepared at no great distance from his own. The same gentle breeze was ruffling the lake and the moon was still clear in the sky; nevertheless, at dawn Hari was awoken by the violent flapping of his canvas and the beat of heavy rain upon the roof. A fierce squall was driving down the valley; and after a while he rose, fearing lest the tent should be torn away; but before he had finished dressing the rain had passed; the sun was shining; and the wind, although it continued, was much less violent.

Stepping outside, he looked about him and never in his life had he seen a morning lovelier than this. The massed clouds were flying away before the sunrise that gilded their rolling whiteness and suffused the uncovered sky with a pale greenness that melted into

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pale blue. Flocks of wood-pigeons were hurtling through the air, the lake was bright with hurrying wavelets, and all the trees around the camp were flinging leaves and raindrops upon the wind.

No one was yet about, and presently he wandered into the garden of the Rajah's house. In its old-fashioned way this garden was pleasant to the eye. The Persian style had not yet come into vogue when it was laid out, and so the designer had been content with a naive imitation of the Chinese. Little streamlets and ponds had been arranged here and there, with dwarf willows hanging over them, and in the background clumps of heavy-flowered magnolias, flame-leaved azaleas, blue hydrangeas, and feathery bamboos. A few exotic trees planted by the old Rajah's father were certainly rather out of place, but there was something pleasing in the very simplicity of the taste that had put them there. Hari sat down upon a bench, and at last the thoughts of Sita which he had been suppressing for so long crowded irresistibly into his mind. He wondered what their meeting would be like; but even now, with his heart beating at the thought of it, he was afraid to give his imagination rein, and starting to his feet, he began wandering again along the narrow, winding paths.

In a little while he was halting beside the largest lakelet, which had a Chinese bridge flung over it, with the usual willow trailing its light green foliage on the water. As he was looking down at the pink lilies he realized all at once that the wind had dropped; everything had suddenly fallen into a complete tranquillity, not a leaf was now astir. Three huge blue and white butterflies appeared and began tumbling about over their own clear reflections. From where he stood the house was out of sight, although it was not more than a few yards away; and presently voices were to be heard in that direction. His heart began to beat once more as he listened for Sita's voice, and in a minute, sure enough, it rang out quite loud in the still air. To his amusement it sounded the note of temper; and, smiling to himself, he made a cautious approach until only a thin screen of shrubs separated him from the open window at which — to judge by the sound — Sita must be standing. She was talking to Amar, whose replies came muffled from the room behind. Her tone continued to be exceedingly cross, and Hari's smile broadened as he realized that he was overhearing a regular domestic quarrel. It was strange, perhaps, that he stayed to listen, especially as he had a horror of the revelations that spring from certain changes of

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voice or manner when people are carried away. In his time he had heard more than one fine lady lose her temper and always to his disillusionment. Yet now, he stood his ground, and, listening, fell into a positive enchantment. Sita could let herself go as much as she pleased, she could storm and rage, but no harm would ensue. Nor did the unfortunate Amar lack dignity, although plainly he deserved his scolding. What he had done was to leave the shutters of the adjoining room open with the result that Sita's best dresses had been soaked through by the rain in the night. Hari's amusement increased every minute; indeed, a quite extravagant joyousness took possession of him. As he stood there amongst the flowers and butterflies the world seemed to him a place of extraordinary beauty. Living appeared to be a wonderfully simple thing after all. You had but to throw away the trouble and worry of taking things unto yourself, and then all the earth would be yours to enjoy in a disinterested ravishment. The striving between man and man would have vanished; Paradise was as simple as that.

Pushing his way quietly through the shrubs, he crept up to the window itself. Sita was no longer there, but as he peeped into the room he caught a glimpse of her sitting at table with Amar. She showed her profile, whilst Amar was presenting his back. There were tea-things before them and a plate of Kashmiri biscuits. Now and then a sigh came from Sita, and her eyes kept wandering over her dresses, several of which were hanging out near the window to dry. Hari waited for her glance to fall upon him, and after a minute she turned her head, gave a slight start, and opened her eyes wide. He had put a finger up to his lips to enjoin silence, and she obeyed the signal. Smilingly he motioned to her to join him in the garden, and, although evidently a little mystified, she nodded her consent.

Waiting for her at the corner of the house, Hari was conscious only of an immense, unhopèd-for happiness; and he said to himself: 'What is this? What is this?' His feelings sharpened into a sense of agonizing sweetness; his being was invaded by an anguish that was delicious and seemed to play not upon the nerves of the flesh, not upon the machinery of the brain, but upon the substance of the very soul. In another moment Sita appeared and they went down together in silence through the trees until they were beyond sight or sound of the house. Then he stopped her and looked into her eyes; and her face, which had been smiling when she joined him,

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was now grave, as if a veil of secret wonder had descended over it. She seemed to be marvelling inwardly, her eyes were deep with divination, and she waited. What he said he hardly knew, but the colour deepened in her cheeks, and the long breath that she drew seemed to be shaken by an inward tremulousness. For a brief space they stood thus, and, while he continued speaking to her, her eyes wandered from side to side, but her hands lay quiet in his. At last she closed her eyes, in order, maybe, to shut out the sound of his voice, or, maybe, to hear it yet more clearly. Did she understand what he was saying? Had she really caught a breath of the wild, spiritual fragrance that was working a miracle upon his heart? A smile had dawned upon her upturned face, and it seemed to him to be full of a tender mockery; but, when she answered, her voice was trembling. 'Oh, it is wonderful to be loved. . . .' She spoke dreamily, as if to herself. 'But one should be wonderful to deserve it. . . . To be loved one ought to be above all change. One ought to be perfect in body and spirit. One ought to exist but for love alone — no matter how short the time. One should be perfect — and then one should die.'

She laughed a little after saying this, and presently he saw that tears were shining in her eyes. While they stood thus together with his arms about her, time no longer existed for them. It was only when the increasing stir of morning broke in upon their ears that they remembered where they were or how they had come to be there.

After watching her go back along the path to the house Hari stood for a long while in a daze. The two butterflies were still tumbling about over the lily-pond, the shadows across the path seemed to be almost the same; but Gokal probably was beginning to wonder what had become of him.

For the rest of that day he felt himself strangely disconnected from all his past, and many days went by before he recovered from bewilderment at what had happened. He understood better now the character of the sudden change that sometimes overtook people, making a saint out of a sinner, or turning a modest woman into a wanton. When he asked himself whether his present disposition was likely to be enduring he could not see the smallest shadow of doubt. Time might work its changes upon the substance of his love, but that love was firmly rooted, and he would carry it, for good or ill, down to the grave. So incontestable did this appear in his own mind

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that he was quite unreasonably surprised not to find the same confidence in Sita. That misgivings had overtaken her became evident in their next meeting. Starting out together from the garden gate, they climbed a little hill at the back of the house and sat down under a solitary pine. It was not until then that Hari noticed that beneath the glow of her happiness there was a deep disquiet. At first she was abstracted and would hardly speak, but after a while she said: 'I have been thinking about Amar . . . and not only of him but of myself. Hari, I am trying as hard as I can not to love you in a human way, only to think of you as something outside ordinary life. You won't think this cold and cowardly, will you? I want what one can get only in dreams. If life is not a dream, it ought to become one. It is like a dream to me that you should love me. What joy it gives me! But now I ask you this: Why should you, who have had many human loves, want just another one? Why not leave this in its own world? You won't think ill of me, will you? But I know how I should want to go deeper and deeper into the heart of things. And then — all the doubt! All the pain! Fresh pain at every turn. . . . Amar tells me that I am an extremist, and that is true. So love must remain a dream for me. In dreams one can give everything — be everything, — but ordinary life is not made for that.'

Hari was very little troubled by these words. His happiness in the present was so great that he made no demand upon the future. To be with her, or even to be aware that she existed, seemed to be enough. He took little account of her fears, and although he succeeded in allaying them temporarily, in the intervals between meetings they would spring up again.

'This still seems so strange to me,' she would say, 'half unreal. . . . And yet if I found it unreal I could never be proud again, I could never believe again that my world was true.' Often she fixed upon him a gaze of troubled intensity. 'I wonder if you can understand? It is dreadfully important to me. You must not break the course of my life with something that is not deep. I could not bear it. It may sound foolish, but my world is very precious to me. You are seeking to break into it. You have broken into it. And now . . .'

When she spoke in this fashion Hari would look anxiously into his heart, but still he could find nothing to shake his self-confidence. Calling Lalita back into mind, so dissimilar did that experience and

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this seem to him that no points emerged even for comparison. And it was the same when he looked further back. What did puzzle him at this time was his complete change of feeling as regards Amar. His former scruples had entirely vanished; but he could not manufacture scruples to order, so he shrugged, and without probing very deeply into the matter, told himself that his conscience was exceedingly erratic.

AT this time the only shadow upon Hari's happiness was that cast by the figure of Gokal. It was becoming more obvious every day that he was not making a good recovery, and Hari anxiously debated whether the cause was primarily physical or mental. The news that Gunevati was probably in the hands of Salim had affected him very strongly; during the conversation his face had alternately flushed and turned pale, his manner had become more and more agitated, and in the end he had fallen into a strained silence. Hari perceived that he was in the grip of jealousy; and, after this, the subject was left alone. It lay between them, occupying their thoughts, but offering no aspect upon which anything could be said.

And it was the same with the subject of Sita. Gokal had begun to speak, but desisted almost at once on perceiving that his warning came too late. His mute sadness made Hari look into his heart again, but still his conscience remained without voice. What had happened was fated, a thing beyond cavil or repining. As regards Amar, both he and Sita were fully as anxious as Gokal that he should not carry away with him into his retreat preoccupations that would hinder his progress; and it was for this reason principally that they were determined to keep their love secret. For the rest, the immediate effect of the happiness in which they lived was to make everything outside their love seem insignificant. In the course of their talks together Hari gave a brief account of his quarrel with Daniyal and of the development of his relations with Mabun at Agra. But all that seemed very far away; he could not give it much importance, and it suited him very well that Sita should take his story in the same spirit. All she asked was that he should not make any important decisions without her knowledge. She felt confident that when it came to the point he would be unable to bring himself to lie to Akbar. Her own loyalty to the Emperor was unshakable, and it led her into tirades against Mabun, whom Hari laughingly defended as one of the cleverest and most single-minded men in the Empire, and a loyal friend as well. This he really believed, although he felt tolerably certain that Mabun would sacrifice him should his purpose require it. 'Mabun,' he insisted, 'is a man of feeling. He rises above his own particular temperament. Never



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would he display a contempt for religion, parade cynicism, or even indulge in irony.'

Endless were their talks together during these days. Sita's alarms were gradually quieting down, and the happiness she embraced rested on a gathering confidence that Hari's love would endure. But did she imagine that he would remain content for ever with the position as it now stood? Would she, indeed, have been quite content herself, had she truly believed that his passion was so easily satisfied? No doubt it pleased her to remonstrate with him over even a kiss, but there was that in her manner which seemed to say: 'And yet I should be disappointed, I confess, if you had no wish to kiss me. Were that the case, our love might become dull to you; it might even become a little dull to me . . . On the other hand, if you could kiss me without protest, might that not become dull too?'

For a time Hari submitted to these conditions without vexation and even when he began to suffer from them he made little attempt to break them down. Nevertheless, one day he felt impelled to speak bluntly. 'How long,' he asked, 'do you imagine that you can go on playing with love?'

'Am I playing with love?' she asked thoughtfully, then added: 'Yes, I suppose I am.'

He said nothing more on that occasion, but his inward disquiet increased. If she, on her side, was now certain of him, could he be so certain of her? She could not be happy without the assurance that his love was serious, and yet she had the wish to make a light thing of it. That was because she was ashamed of taking real love without giving everything in return. She wanted to give her love, and yet she wanted to withhold it. How long was this contradictory humour to be indulged?

When next they met, his manner was as gentle and smiling as ever, but she was not slow to detect a touch of grimness beneath. They were sitting in the woods that went up behind the house, and it was she who first broke the silence that presently fell between them.

'I can see that you are angry with me,' she murmured, 'and I also know why.'

Hari kept his eyes fixed upon the distance, and in a moment she went on: 'You make me feel it wrong to be as I am. You make me feel mean-spirited. And yet — can't you leave me outside the world,

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outside ordinary life? Couldn't you take me more lightly? Couldn't you — ' she hesitated — 'couldn't you play with love — instead of letting it be a sad, craving thing?'

Although he now turned and looked at her steadily, she could not make out what was behind his eyes. She grew more troubled. She hesitated again; and at last, as if in answer to the words that he would not speak — 'Surely,' she said, 'the heart and mind of man, divine and deep, are always unappeasable?' And in a lower voice still she added: 'Whatever I gave it would never really meet your need.'

In the secret depths of his being Hari was shaken. Was it true, what she said? Was it better thus? Was fulfilment always imperfect?

On that occasion again the subject was broken off, the issue left undecided. For an hour afterwards Hari mused in solitude, and later in the evening, sitting beside the lake, he continued his reverie in the company of Gokal, who was plunged in silence too. When next he raised his eyes the moon was up, and his gaze dwelt for a moment upon his companion's meditative face. 'Gokal,' he said, 'I have been thinking for some time that I ought to visit Khanjo.' And he went on to explain that although he had written to Mabun to inform him of Gunevati's disappearance, his report had, perforce, been very scrappy. He felt he owed it to Mabun to make some personal investigations on the spot. The whole journey, he supposed, would take little more than a week.

For a minute after he had spoken Gokal looked startled; then he seized upon the idea with an eagerness that caused Hari some secret astonishment. It looked as though Gokal were not yet resigned, or had, at any rate, allowed the elements of mystery in Gunevati's disappearance to take an undue hold upon his imagination.

Was it by design that Hari set out upon this journey without having any further talk with Sita in private? Perhaps he himself could hardly have given a definite answer. Regarded simply as a piece of strategy the move was not remarkable for artfulness; nevertheless, the abrupt manner of his departure disquieted Sita — it disquieted her, although she could not help suspecting that it was intended to have just this effect.

His second day's travel brought him to the hermit's cave under the cliff. It was situated at the top of a rough slide of rocks, the cave mouth making a black hole in the face of the precipice that

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towered on above. The evening sun was shining upon that great wall of stone and the hermit himself was visible as a small, naked figure against the darkness of his lair. From the road below Hari gazed up and debated within himself; it would be a hot and dusty climb; but he was curious, and the fact that the man was a Sakti no longer discouraged him. As he scrambled up amongst the tumbled boulders he hoped devoutly that the hermit would not retire into the cavern at his approach, as such men often did. It was a relief, upon reaching the stone platform, to find him still there; and he made haste to salute him with every sign of veneration, taking the dust from his feet in the approved manner. The hermit, seated crosslegged upon the ground, looked down at this somewhat ironically. He was small and wizen, and had the air of being prematurely aged. After bidding his visitor be seated, he waited, examining him with watchful, beady eyes, the pupils of which were jet black and the whites strangely yellow. There was a striking contrast between the mean appearance of the recluse and the grandeur of the scene about him. From this high place one looked down the full length of the great, empty valley. At its end the sun was sinking after a day's travel through a burning sky. Glorious was the emptiness beneath, falling westward into the haze of the evening's fullest glow. And in that ocean of sunlight, washing the steepness of the cliff, soaring eagles, like flecks of gold, hung or plunged, and in their descent snatched an invisible prey.

'Why have you come?' asked the hermit.

Hari hesitated. 'To hear whatever you may vouchsafe to say.'

The hermit smiled. 'I am a Sakti of three bars,' — he pointed to the mark on his forehead — 'and when men come to me it is to talk of love.'

'So be it!' replied Hari. 'Of love, then, we will speak.'

'Love,' said the hermit with a sneer, 'is the chief of the fictitious values of Prakriti or Nature. A man assigns value to the beloved and to her love; he also assigns value to his own. Thus he gives himself and his concerns an imaginary importance and flatters his self-esteem.'

Hari nodded gravely, making an effort to conceal the antipathy with which the hermit inspired him. After some reflection he said: 'You are speaking of the love between a man and a woman, but there is also brotherly love and the love of a man for the Divine.'

The hermit opened his mouth in a silent laugh. 'What I have said

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applies to all love. Behind love is the craving for self-aggrandizement. Man has invented God and deified love in order to give himself greater importance — at any rate in his own eyes.'

'If man is the measure of all things,' said Hari, 'then he is as great as he believes himself to be.'

'Unfortunately,' returned the hermit, again smiling his unpleasant smile, 'he cannot believe himself to be great on his own merits. He is always driven to relate himself to the Divine.'

Hari was silent, and for a minute or more his attention was distracted from his companion. The golden haze had deepened; the crags, the precipices, the darkly-wooded slopes melted away from the deepest blue beneath him into filmy transparencies above. Only this cliff and this small rock platform upon which he and his companion were seated glowed still as if in the heart of a furnace, the sun's heat and brilliance still striking there.

Then, as he was still gazing down the valley, he became aware that the hermit was studying him, and he turned to meet those eyes that held a crafty gleam.

'What is your scheme of things?' he inquired, again looking away.

'The world,' said the hermit, 'is ruled by a number of irrational forces, which constitute Prakriti; and we, ourselves, *are* Prakriti. The external world is not mirrored by us, passively, in our sense-perceptions, but created as a magic lantern creates the images that it projects.'

'I have been taught,' said Hari, 'that Prakriti is identical with Maya, the principle of finitude or delusion.'

'How can that be called delusive which alone exists? The Infinite, the Absolute, the Real — call it what you will — transcends the categories of existence and non-existence. For us, therefore, it is not, and never will be. Finitude is essential to existence, and we are finite centres creating the world.'

'And we create love as part of the world,' said Hari, 'yet you began by discriminating against love.'

At this the hermit gave Hari an evil look, but after a moment he said: 'I did not deny the existence of love. I denied the legitimacy of the value attached to it.'

'But your philosophy provides no criterion by which to judge values or even to distinguish between truth and error.'

'And what philosophy does more?' The hermit's evil look had

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returned, but presently it faded into a weary mockery. 'Underlying all philosophies are a set of beliefs that can neither be justified nor rejected; the instinct to philosophize is but one of the minor activities of Prakriti; no philosophy is anything more than an index to the character of its exponent.'

As he spoke these last words he was again smiling, and it appeared to Hari, although he could hardly believe his eyes, that the man actually gave him a wink. For a minute or more nothing was said. Hari was thrown into bewilderment. Was the man really as petty as he seemed? Or did the very enormity of his pettiness redeem him? So dazzling was the yellow radiance in which they were now both enveloped that it contributed not a little to his mental confusion; so majestic was the great bowl of the valley filled with a swirling haze of fire that he could only blink and wonder. When he glanced at the hermit it was to encounter the same watchful smile; and the miserable thinness of the man and the weariness that was reflected in his yellow eyes filled his heart with pity. But it would never do, he felt, to let this appear.

Assuming, therefore, an air of discomfiture, he rose slowly to his feet. 'Your thought is beyond me,' he muttered. 'I must confess that I am no philosopher.' There was an awkward pause during which he kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. Then with an abrupt farewell salutation he took himself off down the slope. The hermit had not ceased to smile, but the scorn in his smile seemed slightly forced, and Hari had the uncomfortable feeling that perhaps his pity had not been successfully concealed. On the other hand, it was possible that he was doing the hermit an injustice. It was possible that the hermit saw everything, including the meanness of his own character, and was sufficiently detached not to care. Was that what the hermit's wink had meant? Was his essential ego so far withdrawn that it took no greater interest in the meanness of the man who happened to be himself than in the meanness of any other?

This state of mind — and he knew it to be not uncommon — perplexed Hari as he considered it. Was character, personality, everything? or was it nothing? In many ways he agreed with the hermit; but he would have liked to go further and to believe that the truth was conditioned by character no less than by sense-perceptions. He would also, however, have liked to think that no human being would ever accept any system of belief that was not in

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harmony with such feelings as those, for instance, just inspired in him by the setting sun. In a properly appointed universe there should be a God with an absolute standard by which human standards were to be judged. If value lay at the heart of things, then objective truth — as reason attempted to frame it — could offer at best but an unimportant aspect of the whole. Realists were apt to disparage value as an all-too-human concept. They were apt to believe that the reason could humanize itself; and then they would prostrate themselves before it with the most abject religiosity. Unfortunately, of all human attributes the most obviously all-too-human was discursive reason itself. For reason was the instrument of man's conscious purposes, and these were the instrument of his unconscious purposes, and these again were but a small part of the activity of Nature or God. Was that activity purposeful, too? Analogy, a poor guide perhaps, but our only one, would say yes.

Having brought these reflections to a comfortable conclusion, he allowed his thoughts to fly back to Sita, and with Sita they remained during the whole of the rest of his journey. The haze of his pre-occupations dimmed even his first hours at Khanjo. Upon the little lawn, where he and Sita had once sat together, he stood in a trance, staring down at the red and brown carpet of fallen rhododendron blossoms that now covered it over. It was very silent here in the wilderness of trees; indeed, the whole place was wrapped in a silence which he felt to be slightly uncanny. All the servants excepting those of the lowest caste had gone; and these, in addition to their usual air of apathy, seemed to him to wear a furtive look. Dusk fell while he sat in the veranda of Gokal's house trying to fix his mind upon the business before him.

It was early next morning when he walked across the yard and threw open Gunevati's room, which had been kept locked since Sita's visit to it. The windows were closed; the sun beating on the roof had heated the air inside, which was heavy and heavily charged with scent. His search took him some time, for he went over every inch of the room. When he had finished he was in a sweat and threw himself down on the bed, yielding to an unaccountable exhaustion. So vividly had this scent and all these intimate belongings brought the girl before his eyes that her actual physical absence was like a kind of self-contradiction in nature. She was here and yet she was not here; and his heart seemed to ache for her.

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But perhaps it was for Sita that his heart really was aching? or perhaps it was out of sympathy for Gokal? In any case, he was in the grip of a new and overwhelming compassion. 'Did Gokal come into this room? Did he see those dresses lying about and smell this familiar perfume? Alas!' he cried out within himself, 'what hideous pain!' And after this there came the thought: 'Shall I ever stand bereft of Sita?'

As he lay there with closed eyes he was gradually overcome with shame at his earlier lack of imagination. Within what narrow limits his self-absorption had confined him! His perceptions, his intuitions, his understanding — how much further they might have gone! The extent of his negligence revealed itself to him now. The longer he stared into the past the darker and deeper became the vistas of his speculation.

Two hours passed by before he got up and prepared to leave the room. The only objects of any interest that he had found were a few scraps of paper inscribed with charms; and these were only interesting in that they raised the question: Whose hand was it, that had penned them? Gunevati herself was, of course, illiterate; the script had a degree of refinement that put the village scribe out of consideration; and the handwriting was certainly not Gokal's. Following an idea that had come to him in the course of his musings he took the path across the valley to Amar's house. Before the door there squatted two or three wretched-looking women who watched him without even turning their heads. Again it entered his mind that they had a secret, and he was glad that he had thought of sending two of his men on ahead. He had selected two lent to him by Mabun and had given them instructions to enter the valley from the other direction in the guise of pilgrims on their way to the Banassi shrine. These men were to mix with the people of the place and pick up all they could. But he was now afraid that they would not find out much, for his own arrival so soon after was evidently putting the people on their guard. No doubt they had jumped to the conclusion that Gokal had succumbed to the poison given him and that his friend had come determined to wreak vengeance upon someone at any cost.

After wandering round and about the house, he found what he was looking for: the place where the rubbish had been thrown. It had occurred to him that some relic of Jali's lesson-hours should surely be discoverable, and his object was to compare Jali's hand-

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writing with that of the Tantric charms. It was not long before he succeeded in unearthing a page of manuscript, some verses from the Septuagint translated into Persian. This exercise could only be Jali's, and he saw at a glance that his conjecture had been correct.

It was in an even more pensive mood that he went back across the valley, and for the rest of the day he sat in meditation in the veranda of Gokal's house. Had there been any doubt in his mind as to what this association between Gunevati and Jali implied, it would have been dispelled by the gross obscenity of many of the Mantras — especially those designed to capture a man's love. And to think that this had been going on under his eyes week after week! What blindness! What stupid incuriosity regarding other people's thoughts and feelings! He recalled his night meeting with Jali in the corridor of the Agra Palace and was filled with contrition at having neglected ever to give the boy more than a passing thought since that day. He had known very well that Jali must be leading an intense inward life, and yet he had never troubled himself to think about it. Had his sympathies been a little more alive, many things might have turned out differently. . . .

The silence and solitude of the place were filled with vanished presences, and his musings took their colour from the deep-hued forest that spread its cloak over every fold of the ground. One day followed another, and his sojourn at Khanjo was drawing itself out much longer than he had expected; but he could not permit himself to leave until he had talked with the herb-woman who had attended Gokal; and she was away gathering roots on the high hills. A hope that he might obtain some fresh light upon the nature of Gokal's poisoning had really held the first place in his mind from the outset.



It seemed to Sita that she had begun to love Hari on that misty, rainy day two months ago, when he and Amar had ridden away from Khanjo. But her love, she supposed, would have lain dormant for ever had Hari not returned and made a call upon it.

One could not know oneself. Although she had sometimes felt that it might happen to her to fall deeply in love, now that the thing had come to pass she was confounded. Could somebody else have foreseen her future better than she? Ambissa, for instance? Even in the old days Ambissa had shaken her head when she saw that the duties of a wife and mother had not absorbed all her sister-in-law's energies. Ambissa, on her visits, had extolled the selfless Hindoo women (whom she resembled little enough herself) and had deprecated her taking so lively a part in the social and intellectual life of Amar's court. And there had been other women, too, who, being inclined to light conduct, interpreted her freedom of spirit in their own fashion. Well, they could now say they had been right; but the world's way of being right was such a shallow way! The world was incapable of understanding what was in her heart now; and in those old days she had been blameless indeed.

Thinking of Jali, she was glad, instead of sorry, that he was spiritually so detached. He loved her no doubt, but she could see that her ways of thought and feeling affected him as strange; and although he was lonely, he seemed to cherish his loneliness with passion. Once when she was teaching him her religion, he looked at her gravely and said: 'Yes, you create Christ; but I create devils.' Jali did not need her, she now said to herself with mingled sadness and relief, neither did Amar. And then she wondered again whether all that had happened could possibly have been foreseen or averted. Not that she wished that it had been averted; she preferred to love, even if loving meant suffering.

The last time, when Hari had ridden away, it had been quite different. She had let him go then without any anxiety. Perhaps she had felt sure that he was taking with him memories that he would be unable to cast off. At any rate, the thought of him had been a warm, steady glow at the back of her heart, making her feel

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life to be rich and deep. That season had been like the spring, a season of promise and expectation. She had been without her present sense of self-committal, of unsafety, of a hunger for a happiness that might easily be snatched away. Now, with each day of Hari's absence, her uneasiness increased. As the warmth of his presence faded, loneliness and misgiving took possession of her heart. She was living with intensity, but that intensity was painful. Hari was the ghostly companion of her solitary walks, and passionately did she argue and plead with him. 'Do not mistake me!' she cried out in her heart. 'Do not imagine that I was born to be a nun. No, I am alive to all sides of love. But, although I need you, I also need to wander in the lands of my own mind — solitary and free. I do not want to be your captive . . . although it could be — it would be — wonderful. You — who are free, too, really — you must let me be free. Don't draw me into any depths however sweet. . . . For I should not be able to emerge whole again; and you — perhaps you would!'

The more deeply and irretrievably she felt her heart to be engaged, the more poignant became the terror lest he should one day fail her. She said to herself that if she could be sure of dying at once she would accept her present risks with a light heart. But one did not die: that was the horror of it. One lived to see the world turn into a waste. And with the memory of the magical world of yesterday, one moved, stiff and frozen, under the cold light of ordinary days; only they were not ordinary days now, but days of agony. 'I could not face it!' she said to her invisible companion. 'For, you see, my dreams and imaginings would have gone too! They would have been lost to me — perhaps for ever.'

Sunk in a deep abstraction she would walk, swift and unseeing, for many miles through the dark woods, and then, stopping suddenly, look round like one aroused from sleep. Her being was saturated with the spirit of the forest through which she had come — the moist, peaty earth, the solemn pools of brown water, the trees with grey lichen hanging down. She would look up at the tall pines standing quiet around her — very quiet, as if concentrated upon their silent growth. She felt the strength of those age-long, patient lives, and throwing herself down and pressing her fingers into the loose, cool mould she lost the outer trappings of personality altogether; she was no longer the young Ranee, nor the wife, nor the mother, nor even the woman who loved. She lost herself com-

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pletely; she was no longer anything but an emotion, so still, so profound, that there was no name by which it could be described.

Two weeks and more went by, and Hari's return was overdue. She began to lose her sleep and she found it harder and harder to rouse herself from long daydreams that were full of pain. Again and again she reconstructed their talks together, and in each one of his words she read a dire meaning, in each one of his silences she found an implication that froze her heart. No doubt he was angry; he was disappointed; he felt that his love had been misprized.

And then, yet once again, she would look into herself and search. Was she really divided in spirit? Was she timid, ungenerous, lukewarm? A good Christian she was not (God forgive her!), but was she not even a woman capable of love? Why had she not been able to yield to love in all simplicity? Why could she not accept that inspiration and live it unafraid? She thought of Christ, and so closely was her religion interwoven with the tissue of her life that she could not now tear the two apart and isolate a moral code by which to judge herself. How could it be wrong — indeed, it could not be wrong — to love? How could it be wrong to do that which was so joyful — and which gave one so much pain?

But what of Hari, as day after day still went by? What could have happened? Was he ill? Was he dead?

And then, to bring her distress to its climax, she was pierced by pangs of jealous suspicion. It came into her mind that Hari might have met with Lalita once again. Was it not possible that his love for that girl had never really died, that the old passion was ready to leap up into flame? These thoughts came to her one night as she lay sleepless; and bitterly did she regret not having made more sure at the very first. She ought to have studied him more closely; she should have been able to read his heart more clearly than he could himself. The torment of these thoughts drove her from her bed; she threw open the shutters and sat by the window in the bright moonlight. Ah, now, she thought, it was too late, too late! And yet what beauty still adorned the world! What peace in that dark night-sky! A gleam of silver shone from the lake where the setting moon just fell upon it. Owls were hooting from far away trees behind the house. She remembered how often she had sat beside her window like this in old days, and what a cool, fresh happiness had then been hers, how smoothly her spirit had slid out into the night. All that was over now. The beauty and the peace were

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remote from her. So bitter was the contrast that a flame of anger leapt up in her heart. It was Hari, not she, who was answerable. Hari's were the blame and the shame! All that she had ever meant to give him was friendship; had she not resisted every step upon the fatal road leading to this?

But her anger flickered out very quickly, and for a space she laid her head on her arms. Then, getting up, and moving with great quietness — for Amar was asleep in the next room — she lit a candle and sat down to write. The trembling of her hand almost prevented her. 'Will you tell me why you stay away, and why you went away without saying a word to me? I was happy before and now I am unhappy. I am frightened — because I did trust you and let myself depend on you. I found in life an added richness and loveliness, but now I feel that life is perhaps going to give me the lie. But it cannot be you who would do this to me? And yet — you went away without speaking a word. I think of the times when I said that I was afraid of becoming dependent on you, and you answered that you would never fail me. But perhaps I am being foolish. . . . I know that I am liable to fall into panics — thinking of change and chance and time that waste this fleeting, transitory world. And the stars, they terrify me. Love is the only fire at which we can warm ourselves when the great spaces look down on us, and the empty coldness of them settles upon us. Up here, under the huge, -snowy mountains, I feel remote from the ordinary kindness of life. Yesterday I walked to the edge of the valley and looked down into the pearly distance towards the plains, and I thought that nothing could match the loveliness of the earth except an exquisite love in the hearts of men. But the thought of you was mixed with a dreadful fear. When shall I see you again? Perhaps you are staying away because you wished me to be lonely and to make this appeal? But that thought frightens me too. Must love be like that — instead of confidence and peace? I only know that I am not used to such suffering, and that not long ago I put all my trust in you.'

This written, she closed her eyes and sat still. She felt more tranquil. It would not be difficult to send the letter off secretly the next day. Having hidden it under her pillow, she sank into an exhausted sleep.

When morning came the letter was hidden again, this time in her dress, and she carried it about with her all day. She could not bring herself to send it. There was a thought in her mind that gave

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her the calm of resignation. She knew that if the worst was true, no letter, no appeal, would be of any avail. One had to wait in silence — if need be, for ever. One had to take one's suffering in secret.

All the morning she sat before the house with a white face and her hands folded in her lap. Would it be possible to retire from the world, she wondered — to become a nun? And, thinking of St. Theresa and Lady Julian, 'Oh! what joy it would give me,' she cried out in her heart, 'what joy, if I could follow in their path!'

Later she went out for another solitary walk. It was a dusky afternoon and the air was gentle and warm. For miles round there was nothing to be heard but the uneven sighing of the wind. She went through a belt of forest, and at its further edge a flock of pigeons were flying in and out of the trees. For a long time she stood watching their quick, strong flight. They seemed unable to make up their minds, but at last they took wing and did not return. Straight on through the wet sky they went, and disappeared into a rainy distance.

She loitered for a while on the outskirts of the wood; sometimes brushing through the damp bushes, sometimes leaning against the trunk of a tree. The wind was coming up from over the hills opposite, with clouds and gloom in its wake. The idea came to her that Hari might be travelling along under that obscurity and she longed to warm her heart with this fancy on the way home; but she resisted; and later she was glad, for when she reached the house Hari had not yet arrived.

HARI's last days at Khanjo were spent in a fever of unrest, and his impatience to rejoin Sita was exasperated by a failure to make any good use of his time. The herb-woman, when at last she returned, assured him that Gokal had been poisoned by fungi alone, but he could not help doubting her. There was nothing to be done beyond giving her money; but not even for money was she likely to incriminate herself; and if, as he suspected, the fungi had been used to conceal another poison which she herself had supplied, nothing, not even the most earnest assurances of pardon and immunity from punishment, would make her confess it. Some people would have ordered that she should be tortured, but that went against his nature. So it might well be that the issue whether Gokal was to live or die lay in the decision of this cynical old woman; but nothing that he could say or do would influence her.

In elucidating the mystery of Gunevati's flight he was scarcely more successful. His men got some evidence that a party of strangers had arrived in the district a few days before the girl's disappearance; and the reluctance shown by everybody to say anything about those strangers made one suspect that they had been persons with full power to intimidate. The people of the district, however, were so base-born that it was unnecessary, perhaps, to look for any reasoned cause for their sullen secretiveness; or possibly they were nervous about the recent murder of a young man from a neighbouring village. Gunevati, it appeared, was indirectly responsible, and for some unknown reason the villagers seemed extremely anxious that the murder should not be investigated. Hari would never have heard of it but for the herb-woman, who evidently thought it only fair to make some return for all the money she had been given. She showed him the place where, according to her, the young man (who had been Gunevati's lover) was buried. There certainly were some suspicious marks upon the ground. The soil was cracked, having swollen up in a blister, and this seemed to indicate that the work was not the work of Thugs, for Thugs always drove a stake through the body to allow the gasses of decomposition to escape without a sign. Nevertheless, there was good cause to believe that many of the men in the village were Thugs; at any rate, as the herb-

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woman significantly observed, they had very quickly established relations with Gunevati, in whom they had without doubt recognized one of Kali's secret devotees. To sum up, the scraps of information obtained were merely confusing; all they revealed was that evil things had been taking place. Hari left Khanjo with thankfulness, determined to forget it as soon as he could, for that little valley held secrets that he could not hope ever to penetrate.

After putting the forest behind him he was able to ride fast, and he certainly made the most of his opportunities. What would he not have given to know whether his prolonged absence had caused Sita a single moment's unrest or anxiety! He could very easily believe that she had remained perfectly serene. He could see her dividing her days between the old Rajah, Gokal, and Jali. She would have listened to the old Rajah's maunderings with delightful patience; she would have played chess with Gokal; she would have gone boating on the lake with Jali; and thus her days would have sped peacefully by. Well! if she had really, been like that, what was he to make of it? How could he escape the conclusion that her feelings for him were very different from his for her? Had any woman, who was herself in love, ever before begged her lover to take his love lightly? Ah, no! he said in sudden agony. And her attitude to him during all their days together, was it not consistent with the theory that she was simply a romantic, a little in love with Love — nothing more! With these thoughts obsessing him, Hari rode fast, indeed; but he could not outride his doubts and misgivings which deepened every hour.

The shadows of the alders were drawing out over the meadows as he urged his tired horse along the last mile. He had a foolish hope that he might come upon Sita sitting beside the lake path, and as he dismounted before the old Rajah's house he gazed up at the windows with the same causeless expectation. It was thus that Amar found him, and there by the gate they stood for a while, before he went on to his tent, but not without having accepted an invitation to come in later on. During the interval he had no thought but this: 'I shall know how I stand the first moment I set eyes upon her.' In his mind the idea had become firmly fixed that this meeting would reveal the turn of his fate. Her face, her attitude, the manner of her greeting — he trembled in anticipation; and it was with a still more profound inward tremor that he entered the room. The sun had set not long ago, and the whole party were seated by the

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window that looked upon the lake. A soft twilight, reflected up from the water, mingled with the yellow shine of the lamps that had just been lit. Some game was being played in which everyone took a part; Sita's laughter was ringing out as he came forward, and it seemed to him in that instant that he was looking upon an ideally happy and contented family group. His eyes sought Sita's, but he could not capture her regard; even as she rose to give him her hand she was still laughing; it was impossible to believe that she had lost her peace of mind for a single moment.

The next few minutes were the most painful in the whole of Hari's life. Again and again he searched Sita's face; it was serene and gay; she seemed not to notice the anguished looks, which — regardless of the others — he could not refrain from fastening upon her. Either she was too indifferent to observe them or she was pretending not to, and he did not know which supposition was the worst.

Very well then! The blow had fallen, and all that mattered for the moment was to keep up appearances. Taking himself sternly under control, he directed his conversation to everyone in turn and abstained from looking at Sita except when actually addressing her. Every moment of that dreadful visit confirmed his first impression, and as soon as he could he brought the ordeal to an end.

Not for one instant did it enter his imagination that the whole fabric of his hopes and fears had been spun out of nothing at all. The simple truth was that his return had swept Sita's misery out of existence in one instant. From one of the windows she had seen him approach; she had overheard his conversation with Amar; she had noted the strain in his eyes, the anxiety in his voice; and then she had rushed to her room to give way to tears. Happiness had come back to her, a happiness tired and tremulous at first, but afterwards triumphant. Once again she could enter into Jali's games with spirit, once again she could offer to those about her an appearance that was not odiously and miserably deceptive. 'He loves me!' she cried out within her heart, 'And if he does not love me enough, I can make him love me more.' From the moment she had seen him coming she had known that she would give herself to him wholly. The struggle was over; her conscience troubled her no longer. So great was this relief from inward conflict that she went about the house singing and laughing to herself.

During the whole of Hari's visit she was divided between amuse-



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ment and compassion. Not all, but a little, of what was passing in his mind she was able to guess. 'Ah, when I undeceive him!' she thought to herself, and the knowledge of the joy she could give doubled her own.

It was in a condition of dreadful calm that Hari walked back to his tent. 'No doubt I deserve this!' he said to himself, and from that thought he endeavoured to extract comfort. Sita had discovered that her heart was, in reality, bound to her husband and child. Could he blame her, if a woman's instinct to colour her life with romance had carried her for a few steps off her true road? Oh, but it was not kind of her to have acted like this! She should have set a watch upon the path from Khanjo and let a messenger intercept him with a letter. She should have spared him this meeting. But how should she — not being ensnared by passion herself — how should she conceive what he was feeling? To understand madness one must oneself be mad.

Presently he got up and stood at the entrance of his tent. A few faint stars behind the clouds gave great profundity to the sky; but the human misery within the insignificant compass of a man's mind could be, he thought, as deep. Yet when he looked back into the tent again and when his eye fell on two or three withered flowers that Sita had once given him: 'A little earthly happiness,' he thought, 'is what man craves. Give him that, poor wretch, and the stars may all go out.'

A small light shining through the darkness marked Gokal's tent and told him that its occupant was still awake. He hesitated, feeling that if he joined Gokal it should be with the object of bestowing sympathy rather than of seeking it. Poor Gokal's unrest had been aggravated instead of assuaged by the brief account already given him of the investigations at Khanjo.

While he was still undecided, the light from Gokal's tent was obscured, but a few moments later he observed that there was still a faint glow coming through the canvas. This showed that the tent door had been closed; and he could not help asking himself what that meant, for Gokal was accustomed to leave his door open all night. After a few moments he stepped quietly through the darkness towards the closed tent. The canvas was everywhere fastened up, but in a minute he found a chink to which he put his eye. Without any shame, and with a good deal more curiosity than he could account for, he set himself to spy into the tent.

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Nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. Gokal was sitting on his couch staring down at something beside him; his face was turned away, but before very long he seemed to catch some sound, for he lifted his head and looked all round about. It was a long, searching look that had something furtive about it; it gave Hari the impression that he was meditating an act that he felt must on no account be overseen. For a moment, fearful of detection, Hari drew his head back; but his heart had begun to beat with a vague, painful anxiety, and after a minute he stooped again to his chink. Gokal's face was now wholly visible, and to Hari's horror, his expression was almost that of an idiot. His eyes were staring widely, unseeingly; his chin had dropped; there was no intelligence, but a terrible, remote concentration of thought depicted on his face.

Hari felt his limbs beginning to tremble; he straightened himself and after a few moments of desperate hesitancy moved quietly away to a distance of several yards from the tent. Then he turned and walked back again, this time making as much noise as possible. 'Still awake?' he cried, and pushed at the flap which was tied over the entrance.

A few moments passed before any answer came, and in the meantime he managed to get another peep into the interior. Gokal appeared to be thrusting something hurriedly away out of sight behind the couch; and his manner, as he admitted his visitor, was awkward and confused. Hari explained that he had just come back from the old Rajah's house, and on seeing a light still burning thought he would step in for a chat. He found the greatest difficulty in giving himself a natural demeanour, for his suspicions were deepening all the time. Gokal, who had again seated himself upon the couch, averted his eyes, swallowed, and said nothing. The small oil-lamp on the table beside him was burning smokily; and it was obviously in an attempt to give himself countenance that he leant forward and made as though to trim the wick; but the shaking of his hand prevented him.

'Gokal,' said Hari, 'I am afraid you have fever to-night.'

'That may be,' the answer came huskily. And he added: 'Yes, I am feverish.'

All at once Hari put aside all pretence. Dropping down on a seat opposite, he fastened upon Gokal a gaze of profound anxiety.

'For God's sake,' he said, 'what were you doing before I came in?'

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‘Doing? Nothing.’

With a gesture Hari brushed this aside. ‘I ask: what were you doing?’

Gokal stared at him warily and in silence.

‘I was standing outside,’ said Hari. ‘I have been watching you for these last ten minutes. Do you understand?’

A frown of perplexity appeared upon Gokal’s face.

Hari drew a deep breath and it was with throttled utterance that he said: ‘Very well. But I shall not leave you. I shall remain here.’

The two men regarded one another intently, and for a while there was silence in the tent. Hari’s gaze was fixed and searching, but Gokal’s was unsteady, and to Hari it almost seemed as if he could see — behind the darkness of those shifting pupils — a headlong rout of thoughts. At last, however, Gokal blinked, sighed, and gently shook his head.

‘Dear Hari,’ he said with a transient smile, ‘you are making a mistake. I am not thinking of suicide — not at this moment, no.’

At first Hari’s expression hardly changed; then gradually his tenseness relaxed. ‘You frightened me,’ he murmured. He was still scrutinizing Gokal with a painful concentration. ‘And even so — there is still something you must explain — there is still something I do not understand.’

The smile on Gokal’s face had been replaced by a look of agony. He struggled with himself, but the agitation that had been discernible in him from the beginning was no longer to be held down. All at once he started a sentence and then cut it short; he began a gesture and left it uncompleted; in the end, with a sort of moan, he leant backwards, he felt with his hand on the floor, and brought up some object that was lying hidden behind his couch.

‘There! Do you see that? And that?’ Down upon the bed he flung a muslin dress, a necklace, some silver bangles.

Bewildered, Hari bent forward and examined them. ‘These were Gunevati’s?’ he asked hesitatingly.

‘Were?’ You say *were*? You think, then, she is dead?’

‘No, no. Why should I mean that? Why should she be dead?’

Gokal took up the piece of muslin, spread it out on the bed, and gazed at it for a full minute with a look that baffled Hari completely. But his perplexity was soon submerged by a rising tide of compassion.

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'So that is what you were hiding from me?' he pronounced with sadness. 'My poor Gokal, what, in God's name, shall I say? You know as well as I do that you are in bondage. You are obsessed. You are possessed. You are mad. Have you not taken that girl's mortal body? Have you not seen into the miserable emptiness of her mind? All that she has or is you have already made yours. What more, then, do you desire? What is it possible to obtain? Companionship, affection, love — they are not in her to give. You know all this. You know your madness. You know . . .'

He stopped. Gokal was neither listening nor pretending to listen; he had a look of agonized intensity; his eyes rolled as if he were seeking some way of escape from the turmoil of his own brain. 'Do you *wish* she were dead?' Hari asked suddenly.

Gokal said: 'I think she is dead.'

'Why?'

There was a pause. Gokal's manner was now so odd that Hari began to fear for his reason.

'Those,' — and Gokal pointed — 'those were the things she was actually wearing when she ran away.'

'But,' stammered Hari, 'but how, in that case . . .'

'Someone thrust those things into my tent — just now — in the darkness — about an hour ago.'

'How can that be? You are making some mistake. Gokal, you know, you have fever. . . . You have imagined. . . .'

Gokal lifted his arms to heaven and groaned. 'No, I am not mad. Someone is mocking me! Someone is mocking me with her death!' And he covered his face with his hands.

It was about two hours later that Hari stepped out of Gokal's tent. The night was dark, with a warm, fitful breeze that blew into his face as he stumbled over the rough grass. The light in his own tent had gone out; on all sides it was dark.

In the course of his talk with Gokal an idea had taken shape in his mind, and after a little while he had felt that he must communicate it. So far, in his account of his doings at Khanjo, he had omitted all reference to Jali. The boy's association with Gunevati was a matter, as he well knew, that Gokal would take very deeply to heart. Poor Gokal would stare aghast at the picture of the evil that he was responsible for.

And yet a complete revelation had now to be made, for it was his present conjecture that the perpetrator of this odious trick was Jali himself. True, he had no theory to explain how Jali had come by those belongings of Gunevati's, and everything behind the actual incident remained as mysterious as before. Nevertheless, his intuition held firm; he was convinced that Jali knew a great deal more about Gunevati than either he or Gokal; and in this piece of wanton mystification he saw Jali's hand.

The pain of the stroke was intensified for Gokal by his affection for Jali and by his previous confidence that his affection was returned. Hari made haste to assure him that he need not think differently now. There was a common propensity in children to indulge in freakish acts of this nature, and it was impossible in the present case to believe that the boy had meant any harm.

After Hari had left him Gokal continued to sit upon his couch before the open doorway through which there flowed the damp night air charged with the scents of grass and sedge, and filled with a thousand rustlings and murmurings, and the creaking of boughs rubbing together in the wind. After a while a gust blew out his lamp, but instead of relighting it he rose and seated himself outside the open door. As the warm wind blew about his limbs he felt his fever leaving him. The absence of the moon and stars made the night intimate and earthly; dry leaves, lifted from the ground, were swept across his hands and face. It seemed as if the earth's secret energies were working upon him, and he yielded to a process which

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he felt to be beneficent. His spirit lay still in a quiet excitement; a sense of expectation gathered; it was like that of a woman who is awaiting the first pangs of her first childbed. Little by little he lost the feeling of his body and his consciousness diffused itself over the night. 'Can this be death?' he wondered, and his answer came as a vanishing of the question's significance. The rustle of the leaves grew fainter, the darkness deepened and became absolute; at last his spirit, completely isolated, spoke to itself and said: 'I am aware only of being aware.' What now remained was a consciousness that was not Gokal's, because it knew nothing of Gokal; nor did it know anything of the world, or of time, or of space. It knew nothing but itself.

The duration of this state was immeasurable for as long as the state was changeless, but it was still without a break of consciousness that the flow of external sensation returned. He became again aware of the rustle of the wind and of time passing; then he recognized the sound of the wind for what it was. In dormancy his memories of the world returned, but long before he evoked them he was active in thought. He said to himself: 'I have had an experience of the possibility of pure self-consciousness. In that state subject and object are one; awareness reflects awareness like two mirrors placed opposite, and that unity in duality seems to constitute self-consciousness, which is also selfhood.'

And then it seemed to him that he was explaining these things to Amar, who shook his head and said: 'The attribution of selfhood is unjustified.'

'But self-consciousness,' he replied, 'is selfhood. It is a closed circuit.'

Amar shook his head again. 'Pure consciousness is consciousness of *its* self, which is not the same thing as consciousness of one's self. Where there is no remembering personality there can be no selfhood.'

As he was considering this, Gokal's eyes began to see again and he noticed a few dim stars in the sky above the hill top. Whereupon it struck him that in the blankness of pure self-consciousness there were no stars; in fact, the whole phenomenal world remained unaccounted for. And on that there followed the conviction that pure self-consciousness was not the final state of spirit, and that his experience was only interesting as a direct personal revelation of the falseness of Amar's last statement. Pure self-consciousness might,

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he considered, be a suspensory condition between rebirths. And this was what he next said, adding that no consciousness which did not comprehend in a static and perfected unity all temporal processes from the beginning to the end of time could claim absolute-ness or godhead.

And again Amar frowned and replied that ideas of personality, even of consciousness, were null when applied to the Absolute. The Absolute, as Buddha constantly implied, was simply that of which nothing could be predicated.

But at this point Gokal felt himself possessed by a keen and irrecusable sense of the reality and significance of the phenomenal world as a feature of the Absolute. 'To philosophize at all,' he said, 'is to postulate that the process in Time calls for explanation. An explanation of it must be explicit or implicit in every system of thought, whether you call it a philosophy or no.'

He would have gone on, but all at once his mind dropped to another plane; his thoughts changed, his attention was fixed upon psychological actualities. Looking into Amar's mind he saw jealousy there and suspicion and yet other shadowy forms of evil. Amar now seemed to him to be standing by the door of the tent with the light of the lamp shining upon him, and the austerity of his countenance and the rigidity of his bearing inspired Gokal with deep misgivings. He thought of Tche-Sing and another Chinese priest whom he knew, both Buddhists of a school kindred to Amar's. These two were far advanced in wisdom, and what was remarkable in their bearing was its easiness, and upon their countenances a smile that bespoke a benign suppleness of mind. A terrible doubt seized him whether Amar was not misdirecting himself entirely; and when he looked at Tche-Sing for an answer, the latter to his surprise bent down to his ear and quoted from the Christian Scriptures: 'If therefore, the light that is in him be darkness, how great is that darkness.' And again yet lower he whispered: 'Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are.' Gokal's heart sank, for he knew that Amar would be unable to make anything of these words, his mind, stiffened by logic, being obtuse to the awful paradoxes of the world of spirit. Yet was it possible that this devout seeker after truth should fail absolutely? In great anguish he cried out: 'Amar, your love for me has been one of the greatest supports of my life and for a two-fold reason. I have felt that you

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were able to love me for myself only *because* I was your brother in aspiration. Now consider this well, Amar, and the quality of your love shall show you a truth that has hidden itself from your intelligence. Upon what does your love rest and unto what does it address itself? You will see that it is more than human and seeks what is more than human. It rests upon an intuition that for you a man is lovable inasmuch as he partakes of the divine essence. You will see that your love addresses itself to the divine. There is no other explanation of the highest love; it has one object and one only. Such love is in you and it testifies to your unacknowledged recognition of God.'

Having spoken, Gokal waited anxiously for a reply; but for a long while Amar remained dumb; and when at last he answered there was anger in his tone. 'Is this how you would help me?' he said. 'Would you tempt me back into doubt? Love is the last of the imperfections to fade before the white radiance of Nirvana is reached. I know who has corrupted you. But, unshakable, I take my stand upon the wisdom of the Enlightened One.'

Gokal lifted his eyes to the heavens, and behold! the night-sky was ablaze with constellations that the earth had never seen before. He was filled with ineffable awe, but he knew that Amar could not share his vision, and he said:

'Where is the doctrine that is absolutely pure? And where shall a man seek truth except from the light within? Listen to the divine Plotinus: "Let us call upon God himself, not by form of words, but by the lifting to him of the soul in prayer. And the only way to pray is to advance solitarily towards the One who is solitary."'

At this point the vehemence of his emotion roused him from his fantasies, but he continued to sit where he was; and, while the day broke and the dawn brightened, his eyes still remained fixed, as if he was unaware of the passing of the night.

A little later, the camp servants, rising to their tasks, looked with surprise at their master sitting there, but although they whispered among themselves, they forebore to approach him. Warm and still was the radiance that flooded the valley, and presently Sita, the sunlight falling upon her eyes, was awakened and went to her window to look out. She saw a flock of wild geese wheeling in the sun. She saw Jali talking to two boatmen who were showing him some kittens taken from a wild cat that had been shot the day before. A little later she saw Amar going down the path towards the lake,



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and remembered that he had told her he had to pay a visit on Shaik Mobarek, who was now in Daniyal's camp.

Whilst dressing with a happy, leisurely care, she went again and again to the window to smell the jasmine that blossomed just beneath the sill. And then it came into her mind that she possessed a tiny bottle of a very ancient essence distilled in Persia from the Five Flowers of Love. Her grandmother, who had given it to her, used to say that the flowers had to be plucked by the light of the full moon when it is as yellow as a jackal and its nether rim still touches the horizon. This bottle she now unsealed, and from the thick amber drops there rose a perfume that was exquisite indeed, but which did not please her half so well as that blowing in upon the fresh air. Those amber drops breathed of loves dead and embalmed, of loves that had been young too many weary years ago. The moon since then had travelled too many weary leagues and seen too many lovers grow old and die. Then her thoughts turned to the poor dead Raneé. Not many weeks ago, as she was bending over a chest of precious silks, another perfume, very sweet but older and sadder yet, had floated up out of a past less far. The memory made her sigh; she put the stopper back into the bottle and went down into the garden. Jali was sitting on a bench overlooking the lake, but he did not seem to hear her when she called; and so, because it was still early, she lingered by the side of the lily-pond where she and Hari had stood together on that day. She recalled how the blue butterflies had been playing over the water, and how clear their reflections had been. Then she went on down the path and through the gate towards the group of tents, and all at once she found herself in the presence of Gokal. Heavy and unmoving as a statue he sat there with the cool, golden sunlight pouring over his white robe and gilding the pallor of his face. She faltered for an instant, for it almost seemed to her as if he was sitting there in the expectation of her coming. His eyes rested upon her with an indecipherable tranquillity, and the idea of accounting for this early visit of hers vanished from her mind. She stood before him in silence and returned his gaze. If he could see into her heart, if he could pierce her outward calm and see the fountains of radiance within, it was well. By him she had the wish to be known fully.

They sat together for a while; and presently, although the words they exchanged were without significance, she felt that he was aware of what she would have him know. But this did not bring him back

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from his remoteness. His eyes resting upon the lake, his face set in a stony calm, he looked like the sculptured image of himself, and his spirit seemed to be communicating with her from another sphere.

After a space they fell silent, and then she rose quietly and stood before him once more.

‘Is Hari still sleeping?’ she asked.

‘Yes, he must be still asleep. When he comes, what shall I say?’

‘Tell him to join me up there.’ Her gaze was fixed upon the wooded knoll behind the house. ‘He will know where to find me.’

## THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER—II

### PRINCE JALI

A COLOURED sail upon the lake caught Jali's eye, and before bending down again to play with the kittens at his feet, he fixed a long deep look upon the opposite shore. There, across two miles of milky-blue water, shimmered and glittered the pleasure-houses, kiosks, and pavilions of Prince Daniyal's encampment. Seen through the haze of the early morning they looked scarcely real — hardly more substantial than their inverted image that trembled upon the lake's pearly surface.

Three months ago, Jali reflected, nothing had been there; that mushroom cluster had not yet sprung up; he would have looked across at a bare, green stretch of marsh, with a clear view to the hills rising behind; and everything would have been different then,—yes, very different.

He sighed and wondered; and well indeed he might. For was it not a remarkable caprice that had prompted a sophisticated young Prince to build a standing camp — a small town, in fact, with all the urbanities and frivolities of a fashionable watering-place — in this remote spot, the charm and beauty of which were nothing if not modest and unspectacular. Nevertheless that façade of light, gay tints displayed itself not inharmoniously across the water; the domes, cupolas and minarets of Daniyal's baroque architecture soared up, jauntily perhaps, but not unpleasingly against the virgin slopes beyond; and this camp, of course, was devoted to the arts of peace, not of war; so that it was admirably fitting that those thousands of tinsel flakes, floating in the air above it, should actually be flocks of white doves, which it had been the Prince's fancy to dip into vats of gold and silver paint.

At a respectful distance behind Jali stood two boatmen, who were waiting for their young master's orders. They waited deferentially, but not without exchanging an occasional glance — a glance that had its meaning. At last, with a nervous twitching of his brows, Jali came out of his muse, and began once more to roll the plump grey-striped kittens over and over with his foot. Absorbed by this play he smiled, and as his face relaxed he looked again like the boy

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who had left home six months ago. But the change was brief; in another minute he drew himself up, and it was with a hard look that he turned to his two attendants. 'Very well, then!' he said. 'The next time I go, I shall go alone.'

Both the men immediately broke out into apologies and protestations, but Jali never even gave them a hearing. 'Leave the boathouse unlocked,' he ordered; 'I might want to go over to-night.'

With these words he sauntered away along the path and presently sat down on a bench overlooking the lake. The garden was now empty save for him; the house behind stood sunny and silent in the slanting golden light; a few bees hummed among the flowers and flowering trees.

As he sat there a breeze came up with the strengthening sunlight; the lake's glass was ruffled and lost the sleepy reflections of the dawn. Jali sat motionless, staring; and such immobility was unnatural in one so young. His childish face had the heavy look that rests upon old faces when unobserved; that youthful body — now well grown, for he had gained much in strength and stature during the last six months — you saw it held rigid with a tensity that obviously corresponded with an inward tension of the mind.

And an hour later, when his mother came out of the house and called to him, he was still sitting there. She called, and you might have seen his eyelids flicker; but by no other movement did he show that he had heard. For a minute she waited, perplexed, then turned and moved away, a figure strolling pensively along under the chequered sunshine of the garden path.

Cold and black and heavy, cold and dead as a stone, does Jali's heart lie within him at this hour. The sun pours its golden warmth along the valley, and he feels nothing of it; those who love him may call to him, but he feigns not to hear; he sits cold, untouched; a blot of darkness, a stain of evil and misery, upon the earth. Peace and beauty serve only to send his thoughts back to happier days; he sees himself again in his father's Palace at home; he sees himself in the morning sitting in his study, its cool walls flecked with a dancing pattern thrown up by the splashing fountain of the court; he sees himself at noon in the white glare of the bathing pool, leaping and diving with his friends; at picnics, laughing; in the dusk of the cypress avenue, day-dreaming; upon his couch at night with the moonlight streaming across the marble floor. Always and everywhere he sees himself as happy.

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But — it was his mind that made this sudden jump — but yet all this was half illusory. These pictures were misty and inexact; memory had sentimentalized them. He saw it clearly in the contrast afforded by another kind of recollection that came to him now. For this was the kind that carries one right out of the present to make one not merely remember — but seemingly *re-live* — a moment of past time. For a few instants, then, Jali stood once again on the balcony of the Agra Palace; once again the wide, unfamiliar plain stretched away beneath him in the evening light; once again the kite was balancing high overhead; once again the little plant was waving in the wind that brushed along the palace wall. The resuscitated moment died again, the strangeness passed, but it left him with a solemn sense of predestination. The forebodings of that small boy on the balcony had — alas! — been amply justified; he had looked into the future with a great fear — and rightly, rightly had he been afraid. Life was not less dreadful than you imagined it: it was far worse. If one survived, if one remained alive in spite of all, it was because one could get accustomed to anything. One had more strength than one knew.

To understand Jali better it is necessary to throw a brief look backwards at his parentage and earlier life. The small principality over which his father ruled stood alone, like a green island, in the sands of the central Indian desert. The oasis governed by Rajah Amar was green and pleasant with the palm and the fig, the mango and the cypress; and not with these only, for it was also the garden of an old-established culture. Whilst the whole, or nearly the whole, of Northern India had seen its native refinements submerged under the wash of a robuster but decidedly cruder habit of life, this unimportant little Court had been left practically untouched. Thus it had been given to Jali to grow up in a community where tradition survived, where manners were still in their golden age, and hardness, coarseness, and ostentation had not yet taken root. And, if his environment was a civilized one; so, too, was the blood that flowed in his veins. Only that civilized blood of his was a mixed blood as well. In him the conflicting spirits of the East and West were both alive, in contact, but not in unison. It is tempting to ascribe to this duality the peculiarities of his nature, in particular that precocity which made him realize — earlier, certainly, and more fully than most children, how starkly each one of us, in his self-

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consciousness, stands alone. As soon as Jali could reflect at all it was upon the points of dissimilarity between himself and others; and as his individuality developed — rapidly, but secretly — into its own pattern, he recognized its uniqueness and regarded it with gathering dismay. Very early and quite instinctively he studied the art of dissimulation, and, since secrecy is a powerful upbuilder of the inner life, he soon had a good deal to hide as well as the skill to hide it. The child that could and would tell you all that passed through its mind would live under no tension, there would be little of that interior fermentation which generates speculative thought. What is told is spent and done with; and that, perhaps, is one of the reasons why an instinct for secrecy is nearly always to be found in children that are thoughtful. It is prudent, it is interesting, and it is certainly not difficult, to hide one's true self; one hides it behind the ready-made figure of the child that one is believed or expected to be; one adopts the suggested appearance, and lives, undivined and undisturbed, behind the mask. No doubt it was the mixed blood in his veins, which, although it did not deprive Jali of the natural affections, held him so far aloof from his father and mother alike. At the age of thirteen his thinking self was deeply ensconced in a retreat that he was determined not to betray.

For two or three years already he had been firm in the belief that he differed gravely from the rest of mankind. First and foremost, to his thinking, he differed in being full of fear. Long before his journey from home fear had already established itself as the great principle of his secret life. Each increase in his power to reflect had shown him more clearly than before that the present moment of any creature's happiness was balanced upon a knife-edge with abysses of calamity on either side. Nor was it only the undisputed evils of life that he feared: the mere business of living seemed to him to call for a succession of efforts, audacities, and endurances, that were truly appalling. This idea was strengthened by observation of others — in particular, of his father, whose routine of self-discipline and activity he watched with secret awe. But his mother, no less — how wonderful, how incomprehensible, she was! And the same lesson was impressed on him when he cast his eyes outside the Palace gates, where the poverty-stricken, the diseased, the altogether luckless, swarmed and endured their fate. What a front humanity presented! What pluck, what spirit, in high and low alike!

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To be fair to himself, however, he had to add this: there were signs everywhere that other people didn't mind the things he minded — or at any rate, not half so much. They didn't even notice a great many things that turned him sick with pain. They were different; he was always brought back to that. He saw it in everything: they didn't think the things he thought, nor wonder at the things he wondered at, nor like the things he liked. They were utterly different. But if this was comforting as an excuse, in another way it was exceedingly depressing; it made one feel so lonely.

To himself, Jali felt, and to himself alone, could he look for the explanation of things. Other people's interpretations of the world might do for them, but they would not do for him: his problems presented themselves differently. Thus, at this early age, he was already engaged — and more or less wittingly — in a single-handed endeavour to relate himself to the world; and by the world he meant sometimes the world of men and their affairs, and sometimes the world of the gods. A feeling that might with equal fairness be called pride or humility told him not to expect much enlightenment from outside.

With all this, however, he was eminently teachable. His masters found him quick and receptive; and in the matter of spiritual illumination each of his parents was delighted by his ready understanding. Rajah Amar believed — and was right in believing — that his son's grasp of the Buddhist doctrine was as complete as could be expected in a boy of that age. Sita, similarly, made no mistake in believing that Jali's nature was responsive to the truths and beauties of the Christian faith. What neither the one nor the other suspected was that his eclecticism covered a peculiar kind of unbelief. He accepted the things told him as true for the teller, but he could not believe that they were true for himself. Most often, indeed, whilst listening he was unconscious of this unbelief of his; it was only afterwards, in a moment of meditation, that he became aware of his own scepticism. But so it was with him: until an idea had received the stamp of his own private endorsement, it remained a stranger in his mind, however hospitably he might entertain it. And thus the truths of Buddhism and Christianity were comfortably accommodated there; they lived at peace in his guest-chambers, but to the inner places of his personality they had no access.

His parents knew as much about him as any parents were likely to have known about such a son. Their love for him and his for

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them only sharpened his capacity for deceiving them and theirs for being deceived. It was true that besides seeing what he showed them, they saw a little of what he did not mean to show; but it was precisely with that little that he deceived them most. For he almost always knew when he had betrayed himself and would instinctively set about turning that piece of self-betrayal to good account. Thus, when they told him that they proposed to take him to Agra, he simulated pleasure; but his pretence was not good enough, and at once he knew it. Instinctively, therefore, he set about providing them with a misleading clue to the nature of his reluctance, pretending, first of all, that he was distressed by the prospect of leaving his boy friend Nazim, and secondly, that he would sadly miss his polo lessons. As a matter of fact he had little affection for Nazim, who bored him; and as for polo, he detested it. But these dispositions of his were pretences of long standing; and they served him well at this juncture as a means of disguising the truth. Actually, what he experienced was the stab of a complex and almost indescribable anguish. For months and months he had been awaiting this, or something like it; and in the now decreed journey to Agra he saw the hand of an inexorable fate. To look at him, you would have said that he found the idea of leaving home exciting, perhaps even a little awe-inspiring, but only when he took the trouble to think about it; and it seemed equally plain that he did not think about it very much. Really, his parents would say to one another, although Jali was precocious in many ways, in others he remained distressingly backward. When would he learn to take a *practical* interest in the world about him? or show a desire for the actual *experiencing* of life?

The actual experiencing of life! Now this of course was exactly what Jali was brooding over — with terror — every hour of his existence. Hence that air of childish unconcern, a labour of instinctive shame and cunning. He offered the appearance of being engrossed in the present, because the present was nothing but a continuous dread of what the future held in store. The future, his fear of it, and his deepening conviction that he was unequal to facing it, were never out of his thoughts. The view he took of his own case was certainly far graver than that of his parents. It was his conviction that his incompetence, his timidity, his want of buoyancy and self-reliance, were symptoms of a predisposition, which, unless defeated, would lead to his utter destruction. He felt



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this, he knew it. He opposed himself violently to his self-confessed cowardice. There was a stern mentor within him, a tyrant who strove to drive him to all the courses that his nature hated most. The more he quailed, the more he had to dare; the more he shrank, the more he must some day undertake. His being was shaken to its utmost foundations by this inward conflict.

Such had Jali been in the days of his home-life. His eyes then had been fixed in terror upon the moment when he would be obliged to emerge from the deep, dark solitudes of the self in which he had lived hitherto so intensely and with so much hidden fear. The heroic resolutions that he was building up would then have to be translated into actions; one day he would be storming the invisible barriers that separated him from the world of men.

Well! The decree had gone forth at last, and as the day of departure drew nearer and nearer he felt that this good-bye to his old life constituted a veritable death. If a boy named Jali came home again, it would be a different boy. He was committing suicide, only not by sliding into peaceful death, but by violent metamorphosis. Not for one instant could he envisage the possibility of enduring failure and returning unchanged. The desperation into which he had gradually been sinking forbade any thought of that. To return to the solitary island of self, after having failed to effect a landing on the busy continent of mankind? To listen, as an outcast, to the great seductive murmur of real life in which one could take no part? To submit in tameness to one's enduring impotence? No! that never! He must change, and change completely, before he would consent to come home again. If necessary, he would run away from his parents; he would disappear into the unknown.

At night, with these thoughts, he shivered from terror; and often tears of self-pity would trickle down his cheeks. Why was he predestined to so hideous an ordeal? Why could the love of father and mother do nothing for him? Why could no one ever understand or share his secret burden? Examining his parents he saw them as strangers; he loved them, they loved him; but they were themselves, and he was himself; to each man his burden; there was no sharing, no relief. The blackness of such reflections was like the blackness of the solitudes between the stars.

On the eve of the great day he was calm. Towards sundown he persuaded his father to accompany him to the top of the tower and point out the route over the desert. For the last time he fixed his

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gaze upon the visionary line of hills that had been his horizon until now; and the thought that he would soon be treading that ground with his feet and touching it with his hands, threw him into a strange bewilderment. His father directed his eyes to a faint, purple streak upon the belt of gold; that was a crevice in the mountain-side, a shadowy gorge through which the cavalcade would pass. And beyond — but Jali was no longer listening; his thought had stopped to hover over that spot. How could that mystic *There* ever become a *Here*? It could not — without changing. It existed only in its thereness. No one ever got *There* — unless, perhaps, in the impossible Heaven of the Christians.

While he gazed, the vaporous gold melted, the mystic range was lost in the hot browns and purple of the desert night. He descended from the tower with a melancholy that was benign compared with his long-accustomed anguish; a breath of indifference that had been wafted from those distances that were after all unattainable.

AFTER the journey came the Agra Palace, and at once these long, absorbing days of travel disappeared into the background; he parted with them abruptly — just as he had already parted with nearly everything that belonged to his former life.

Here, at last, he was in the great world. Pomp and circumstance surrounded him, brilliance and bustle pressed close on every side. Great ladies and their flocks of attendant maids filled the air with cries and scents; the flutter of their raiment was a perpetual breeze; they surged up and down the stairs, they ran into you at every corner; and then they were always laughing, always, it seemed, in a condition of happy excitement. This was the Great World with a vengeance, and Jali clenched his teeth. So long as no one paid any attention to him, it was endurable; but unfortunately, quite often he was noticed. The smiling girls that pushed past in the corridors would fling a word over their shoulders; a great lady, as he peeped out on some terrace, would beckon him to her side. Sometimes, even, two or three of these alarming creatures would cluster familiarly about him, and then there would be questions and sallies, and it would be for him to play the game, to show what stuff he was made of.

In this extraordinary place how much at ease, how casual, everybody seemed! He found himself flattered and petted one moment, and dropped out of mind the next. Nobody knew, or cared, who he was; no one was self-conscious or shy. Any day, through a doorway carelessly curtained, he might catch sight of some beauty at her toilet. The things he saw did not shock him, though they often astonished him not a little.

Well, here he was! — and perhaps the strangeness of it would wear off. He was resolved to shirk nothing, to welcome every experience. He would do his best, albeit a timid, blushing best it was bound to be. Most important it was, too, that he should hide his deep, inward agitation; for what, others might well wonder, what was there here to be so agitated about? To another doubtless these new experiences would not seem to be of any particular moment; and how could he explain that for him they were terrific, that his ability to cope with them was for him almost a matter of life and

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death? He had put himself on trial; he had set himself a desperate task; it was for him to become one with the world instead of remaining an oddity and a stranger. More than once in his self-communings he called into mind the words that his Uncle Hari had spoken to him in that strange midnight colloquy of theirs on the very first night of his arrival. 'Not to be afraid of others you must be like them, and in order to be like them, pretend to yourself that you are. And Hari had also said: 'People are much better than you imagine.' That meeting with Hari had surely been a sign from Fate; it was meant to set the seal on his resolve.

At the close of each one of these anxious days, Jali would review his course and wonder if he was getting on as well as he should. Was he finding his feet like the two or three other boys — slightly younger than himself — who already seemed quite at home in their surroundings? After a week or so, when his first perturbations had worn off, he took stock of his position, he gave it a colder and more searching scrutiny than he had dared to do before. The result was chilling. A terribly discouraging fact took shape before his eyes: he was not — no, he was not a success. Impossible to remain blind any longer: here he was in the world, the world was all round him, he was struggling to amalgamate with it — but it was no good. Instead of feeling less alien, he was feeling more so; and all these strangers, he greatly feared, were feeling the same thing about him too. Neither his anxiety to please, nor his good manners (he couldn't help knowing that his manners were quite good), nor anything in his whole equipment, was of any avail. Not even his aptitude at pretending to be other than he was. He knew of course how to put up an appearance that suited his parents, but as for these new people — he simply could not find any fashion of making himself pleasing to them. Without a doubt they had an instinct that he was not one of them; they could see through him, even when he was most artful. And what made this perspicacity of theirs the more extraordinary was that these people were not clever; in fact, they were extraordinarily crude and imperceptive compared with the people at home. This inferiority of theirs struck him at once; but it didn't make his want of success any the less bitter. After all this was the world, and he had to take it as he found it; this was the world, and he was much too anxious and overawed to assume the office of critic. No, for the time being his mind dwelt only on the astounding merits of these people — their self-assurance, their know-

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ingness, their nonchalance and gaiety. How amazingly well, too, the happy creatures understood one another! Oh, they knew the world in and out! In that vast region of acquaintance where he was a stranger, they moved about at their ease. So little was Jali tainted by priggishness or snobbery, so completely was he out of conceit with himself just now, that he would gladly have bartered a whole bushel of his own wares for a few pecks of their robuster merits. A stout heart and a thick skin, a knowing eye and a ready laugh — these, these were what he admired and coveted.

It was not until later, not until he had been reduced to despair — and then only in the moments of his despair — that his natural taste asserted itself; but when these rare transports of revolt did seize him, scathing indeed were the judgments that he passed. Then, in solitary storms of fury and contempt, he would contrast the women of the Palace with the people of his father's Court at home, and — good God! — how uncultivated, how tasteless, how deep-seatedly vulgar they nearly all appeared. Crude they were, and stupid, whenever they touched upon a matter outside the sphere of their particular worldly competence. If these people were offering him a fair sample of the world, the world was not a very fine place. His father had warned him, it was true, that Akbar's guests, gathered together on the sole principle of worldly greatness, were likely to vary considerably in other respects; he had been warned, too, that smartness and vulgarity often went hand in hand; but, good heavens! those gentle forewarnings had hardly prepared him for this! And yet he despised, he fought against, his own fastidiousness. What was the use of blushing and wincing and being ashamed on behalf of others who were not ashamed of themselves? 'Why must I be such an infernal prig?' he asked himself more than once. However, there were some aspects of this life that he did savour in a quite unpriggish fashion; like all children, he could take a pleasure in being scandalized; and if the vulgarities remained an offence, the improprieties that he observed were an excitement and a pleasure.

But none of this was of any consequence — nothing mattered except the dreadful, outstanding fact that he was a failure. And now it was his problem to discover the cause. Hour after hour he brooded upon this agonizing mystery. Why was he different? In what particulars did he displease? Why was he in the humiliating position of having to overcome indifference that verged upon dislike? And why were his best efforts of no account? It was

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beyond his power to make it out. One or two of his mistakes he did discover and correct, but this was not enough. For instance, having grasped the fact that good manners are an offence where the general level is low, he did his best to copy the prevailing mode. That helped; but after that? What else could one do? Poor Jali! if he had been fairly quick to learn that those who do not possess any natural refinement bitterly resent that quality in others, he did not yet fully realize that refinement is the hardest thing in the world to dissimulate. His new acquaintances detected evidences of it in his very endeavours to disguise it. His very humility was humiliating them.

But against all these discouragements he persisted with the doggedness of a growing despair, and it struck him that by observing his parents he might pick up some hint. In a sense his father and mother stood mid-way between him and the alien world; although they remained detached, they were not like him, hopelessly out of touch. Well! very soon he decided that his parents and the world entirely misconceived one another, and were in contact only by virtue of their misconceptions. His parents took a view of their Palace acquaintances that was comfortable and convenient to themselves; and the world similarly made up for itself a comfortable work-a-day conception of his parents. Why couldn't he and the world come together on the same lines?

He bent his mind to this problem with intense concentration. Of course the reason why his parents didn't see the world as he saw it, was that the ladies and maids of the Palace were careful that Rajah Amar and Ranee Sita should not. (*He* was only a child, before whom anything could be said.) His parents positively invited the world to deceive them; they called for certain appearances, and other people instinctively acted up to expectation in just the same fashion that he did. Yes, and the other side of the matter was this: by calling for certain appearances, you expressed yourself as a type, you exhibited certain recognized features, a stock personality; you gave people a plain, straightforward reading of your character. The view that the Palace people took of his parents was ridiculously superficial, but that didn't in the least matter. The point was that his parents and the world each presented the other with something intelligible, they presented stock-in-trade figures between whom a stock-in-trade intercourse was possible. When he came to think of it, was not his own communication with his parents

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conducted through the agency of a fictitious personality? And had his parents been more penetrating, had they been discerners of reality instead of instigators of pretence, wouldn't they have seen through his disguise long ago? And, if they ever had, wouldn't they have been dismayed by the emptiness behind? For the real Jali — who was he? What was he? One really couldn't say. Anyhow he didn't seem to be taking part at all, when it was a question of human intercourse. The true self seemed to be isolated by its own inalienable nature from other true selves. It was appearances that formed the bridge between person and person. Moreover, his true self, the real Jali, was emptiness — was nothing at all. Yes; even to himself he was an emptiness, a nothingness. And didn't it emerge out of all this that what he was inclined to call real was nothingness itself?

Having pushed his thoughts thus far Jali halted somewhat breathlessly. It seemed to him that he was at last gaining light. To live in and for reality was to dwindle and fade, to accept appearances was to wax fat and grow strong. It was by cultivating the appearances and illusions belonging to the outer man that you not only offered to others but obtained for yourself a substantial and intelligible being. A man should give and take generously in the false coin of appearances. You possessed a character, solidity, force, by virtue of your unawareness, your obtuseness, your incapacity to perceive the inward hollowness of things. Was it not obvious for instance that his father was only able to be a Buddhist by ignoring everything that told against Buddhism? And was not his mother with her Christianity in exactly the same position? People had to choose between *seeing* and *being*. The more of reality you saw, the less of being you possessed. He, Jali, *saw* things as they really were, and *was*, in consequence, practically nothing at all.

With this it seemed to Jali that he had come out into the full light of a great truth. He was laying hold of verities that had been incubating darkly within him from the beginning of his life, and, as his ideas took shape, he trembled with excitement. What he was discovering was of sovereign importance to him — a scheme of the world, a system of thought. For days he continued to brood over his constructions and test them in the light of remembered experience. He found their truth exemplified everywhere. Take the case of that big, jolly man, Narsing Deo — no one could be more vital, positive, and substantial than he, and no one assuredly could be more imperceptive, farther away from the heart of things.

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Then look at all these noisy, childish, excitable women in the Palace — were they for a moment to realize their own hollowness and vanity, what would happen? Why, they would collapse — collapse into something as lifeless and colourless as he himself. Consider again that little boy of eight who lumbered about the corridors on all fours, playing at elephant, a great favourite with everyone, although he was very much in the way: — if the women all took to him so kindly, it was chiefly because they all knew exactly where they were with him: his limitations made him definite and intelligible, so that one could smile indulgently as he lumbered by. Well, now! it was in exactly the same spirit that his parents and these people accepted one another. In an exactly similar manner these people smiled at his father and mother with their Buddhism and Christianity; while the latter, on their side, had an equally benign smile for the characteristics of their Palace acquaintances. All that anybody wanted, or needed to offer, was something graspable; and it was odd, but established beyond doubt, that what was graspable could not be spirit — it must be illusory — in short, Maya.

So Jali had come back to a position that lay inside the philosophy of his father's race, although his road had been all of his own finding. And since the translation of intuitions into ideas always brings exhilarations, these ideas, although not in themselves very exhilarating, did much to raise his spirits. He had been born — he felt it — for speculation; and whereas the ready-made speculations of others could not, unfortunately, take hold of him, now at last he was on the way to building up his own body of truth. There was something rather grand in that, and it was not lost on him. His sense of inferiority was balanced by an equal sense of power. If he *was* nothing, on the other hand he *saw* everything. He stood in an isolation that was at once contemptible and splendid.



EVER since his arrival at the Palace Jali had mixed with its inmates as much as he could, for that had been an essential part of his self-discipline. Mercifully, however, this Palace life had been broken up by days spent at Gokal's pavilion in the Royal Hunting Grounds; indeed, without these excursions he could hardly have supported the strain of his present mode of existence. After the chatter of crowded rooms, the turmoil of thronging corridors, after his incessant unsuccessful efforts to 'catch on', to look happy and alert — after this torment, the peace of the woods was Paradise.

Loitering alone along the leafy paths or sitting dreamily by the lake-side, he found something akin to resignation. In this mood he took a quiet pleasure in reflecting that all was vanity: everything that other people thought was vain, and all their zest foolish. Just as the women of the Palace were noisy and excited about nothing, so also his father was grave and intent about nothing, and his mother eager and happy in a world tinted rose-colour by her dreams. All these people had personalities; they were able to entertain the illusions that endow one with a personality; they became opaque, solid, comfortable to themselves and others. But he couldn't do it; he was doomed to remain as weak and limpid as water. Something in one ought to darken, he supposed, a nucleus ought to form, around which one's own illusions, and other people's illusions about one, grouped themselves — until one developed substance — until one became, if one was really lucky, 'a character' — for instance, a great jolly mass of vitality and nonsense like the lovable Narsing Deo.

This peace of course was not very far from despair, and yet Jali had not yet entirely abandoned his purpose. After all, having succeeded in making up an appearance that satisfied his parents, why should he not find one in the end that would satisfy the world? For the moment he was drawing breath, casting around for fresh expedients, trying to recover strength. And now, in the desert of his dejection there was revealed to him a stream of spiritual sustenance along which he could direct his steps. His parents had persuaded Gokal to take up their son's instruction at the point where his earlier teachers had broken off. In inaugurating these lessons

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Rajah Amar had been quietly confident that Jali would emerge with a mind quickened to the truth of the Buddhist doctrine, and Sita was equally confident that nothing in Gokal's teaching would loosen his grasp of Christian principles. The boy was well aware of what his parents thought, and, in consequence, extremely reticent concerning his own thoughts. The truth was, of course, that he had never been able to bring either Christianity or Buddhism into any relation with the problems of his inner life. Christianity elucidated nothing for him; on the contrary, it insisted upon a set of beliefs that seemed to him so arbitrary that he could only wonder how they had ever arisen in anybody's mind. How could anyone believe that a soul sprang into existence on this earth and then continued to live for ever after? Surely if there were such things as souls, their existence must stretch back into the past as well as forward unto the future? And then, was it reasonable to think that 'being good' during one brief earth-life was a matter of such importance as to determine the whole everlasting future of an immortal soul? And this idea of goodness as something quite independent of knowledge and understanding, what was the sense of it? Why was so much importance attached to it? Only to a few departments of human life did the idea of goodness have any application. Goodness, in his mother's sense of the word, did not apply to a poem or to a truth, or to most of one's daily behaviour. Moreover, why was it 'right' to regard life itself as a blessing and to believe in so many things that were obviously not true? The Buddhist attitude towards life seemed to him much more reasonable; but alas! it was singularly uninteresting. You were forbidden to speculate on any of the matters that most invited speculation. You were told neither why nor how the world came to be the extraordinary place it was. Jali took an interest in life that was commensurate with his immense fear of it; he had a very lively sense of the power and reality of evil, which Buddhism made nothing of. The truth of the matter was that if his mother's religion was too fanciful for him, his father's was too fanciless.

But what was Gokal's religion? He did not know, and he suspected that Gokal did not know. Yet through his teacher's utterances there breathed a spirit of infinite refreshment. Gokal's personality captivated him entirely, lifting up his mind, not only out of the heated, noisy atmosphere of the Palace, but also out of the haze of his own immature theories. He was lifted into an air

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that revived his blood, and reanimated the flame of a spirit that bewilderment, self-depreciation, and failure had reduced to an anguished flicker. Whether his teacher was engaged in expounding the central beliefs of the Vedanta, in drawing comparisons between the doctrines of Christ and Buddha and Plato, or in considering the arguments for and against pre-existence, Jali's whole being was vibrant with response. During these distressful days his intercourse with Gokal kept his self-respect alive. The idle chatter of the Court ladies and their maids was generally quite above his head, but this man he could always understand. The world despised him, it shouldered him aside; but this sage treated him as an equal, giving him speech worthy of the gods. Upon Gokal's terrace, under a huge blue umbrella with golden dragons sprawling across it, Jali would lie at full length, his eyes fixed upon his friend's face, deeply intent and never wearying. His attention was all there, even when the other delightful components of the scene were present to his tranquillized senses — the glitter of the lake, the birds calling monotonously in the trees, the monkeys scuffling over the shingle of the roof. Those hours upon the terrace had a healing influence of which he stood in sore need. In his despair he had begun to despise everything that he found in himself, even those qualities which he shared with his parents, and had been inclined to admire in them. But now, dimly, yet not uncertainly, he detected in this man's nature a strain even more intimately sympathetic to his own hidden and despised self. And the extraordinary thing was that, if such a weakness existed in Gokal, it was continually converting itself by some miracle of self-transcendence into a strength that was superior to that of the strong. Gokal, he liked to think, might actually both *be* and *see*: in him vision might be combined with power.

Already he loved Gokal, yet not even to him was he willing to confide the secrets of his inner life. A natural privacy surrounded your central spirit, making it indecorous, as it would certainly be futile, to attempt to share the ultimate burden of self-consciousness. Nor did Gokal ever question him, he was content not to press too close. He gave, however, abundantly; he was not reluctant to expose, even before this small boy, his deepest meditations, or to ruminate, as with an intimate friend, on the problems suggested by his own life. Sometimes frowning with confessed frustration, sometimes smiling in self-mockery, but always with a perfect singleness of mind, he would pore over the special subject of the hour,

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examining into its mystery with slow, careful words, and, as it were, turning it over with expressive movements of large, beautiful hands.

Then, after he had gone back into the pavilion for his siesta, Jali would wander away into the woods behind the house. For a while his face would remain eager and his eyes brilliant as his thoughts continued upon their set course. For a while they would wing their way in the high air to which Gokal had transported them; but little by little the spell would wear off, the climate of his mind would change, and he would find himself once more wandering despairingly round in the old labyrinth of his perplexities and fears. That was a region that none of the saints or philosophers in history seemed to have any knowledge of. Not one of them started with a spirit as dreadfully sceptical as his.

Thus, once more in the company of his own loneliness, he would creep about under the thin shade of the parching trees. The hot noontide hush would be lying upon the land — upon the plains, the deserts, the forests, upon the whole of India and beyond, if only one's fancy could picture it. In that hush he moved and loitered and halted; he listened to it and felt it engulfing him in a vastness that was without bounds. He looked up into the thirsty foliage, he listened, he peered, he followed with his eyes the irresolute fall of a leaf. Flimsy and tattered was all the shade that these poor branches could now give; and alas for the green and sappy things that had trusted to their protection! Alas for the mosses and grasses and cool-veined plants, alas for the delicate bushes, huddling vainly in patches of ground that had once been moist, in crevices that had once looked safe! The furious sun, by sheer persistence, had broken through to them, turning them suddenly into skeletons; and it was these beautiful silvery skeletons that now invested the wood with its air of magical desiccation, and by the clinking of their fairy bones filled it with its peculiar silky rustle. That rustle! — hark to it now! — rushing past, like a flight of ghosts, upon the hot wind's breath.

Here and there, it is true, a tree of stouter foliage had resisted, its shining leaves still strong to throw the sun's arrows off. All round its trunk there would lie a pool of darkness, a small sanctuary of comparative cool. Here one could stand and think. But at this hour of the sun's full might how could one really think? The white silence and blazing mystery of noon roused one to an activity that

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spent itself in sheer entrancement; it could not be turned to any knowledgeable purpose. In the silence and mystery of the night thought was free, but now you halted, you waited, you listened and peered; you were filled with expectation — and that was all.

In the course of these long scorching days Jali grew familiar with a dozen narrow tracks, so invariably deserted, so aimlessly meandering, that at first their existence was a puzzle to him. But presently he discovered that most of them brought one in the end to a small dilapidated Hindu shrine that stood by itself in the midst of the wood. You could hardly call it a temple, for it was so small, but it had its own enclosure which was separated from the jungle by a low mud wall; and it had a group of sacred fig trees at the back of it. In days long ago its squat sun-baked walls must have been gay with paint, but the colours had nearly all peeled off. The low, round, whitewashed dome sheltered an altar upon which stood a primitive lingan. So it was really a temple, although a very humble one; it still was the home of a god.

Jali came here quite often, attracted by the subtle and benign character of the godling whose presence pervaded the whole grove. There was a mystic harmony in the pattern made by the twisted branches of the sacred trees. There was a mystic beauty in the shadows they threw on the dusty yellow ground. Often and often he would stand on the fringe of the wood, considering the place and yielding to its influences. He never met anyone here, but it was evident that the temple had not been completely deserted. Fresh offerings of marigolds and bilva leaves appeared nearly every day upon the altar; and well did he understand this continued fidelity of the few.

One afternoon — it was certainly the hottest of the year — he made his way through the dry, bleached grass, under the dry, rustling trees, and stood surveying the temple in the abstraction of profound thought. But this time there came to him, after a while, the feeling that he was not alone. Perhaps, he reflected, it was the company of the grey monkeys that he was sensible of, for, after squatting asleep upon the pipal boughs, they had begun yawning and stretching their arms. 'The shade of the pipal spreads peace, the shade of the pipal spreads peace', these words repeated themselves in lullaby fashion in Jali's mind, and presently he sighed, and, like a monkey himself (they had once more become torpid), squatted down upon his haunches and let the lids drop over his

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eyes. But a little later he opened them again, and his attention was at once caught by a patch of colour that had appeared beside the temple wall. It was a woman's dress; and when the figure rose to its feet he recognized Gunevati. Once or twice already he had seen the girl in the yard of Gokal's pavilion, and each time her beauty had struck disquiet into his heart, leaving an ache that had been slow in fading away. For this reason he had unconsciously avoided going into the yard of late. But now, from his lair in the dry grass, he looked out upon Gunevati with an interest that was less uneasy. His gaze sharpened, his pulse quickened, but the peace of the benign godling was upon him, and he remained collected.

In and about the temple doorway Gunevati drifted, loitering, halting, and going on again, her lovely body as lazy as a water-weed swaying in a stream. Overhead the sun's eye glared intolerably and the weight of noon lay upon her like the heavy waters of a deep sea. It seemed to Jali that in her dreamy dawdlings she was at one with the unhurried earth: she was like a lotus unfolding upon a mere, she was an evening cloud, she was a down-fluttering leaf, she was the slow yawn of the golden tiger drowsy in his cave. And the present moment — usually as sharp as a knife-edge ripping between the past and the future — the present moment, as he watched her, expanded into a great lake of peace.

After a while her eyes turned in his direction, and as her gaze settled upon him her movements died into a pause. With great intentness they contemplated one another; time's leisurely progress was suspended altogether; the world waited, or so it seemed, in a little interval of complete rest.

Bright, fixed, and expressionless as those of a mouse, Jali's eye stared at the girl over the stalks of the jungle grass; and her eyes were expressionless too, until a slow smile spread up to them from her slightly-parted lips. At last, without changing his posture, Jali beckoned, and after a moment she came. Leisurely, confidently, she squatted down beside him; and then they began talking together in the special, muted tones imposed by the majesty of high noon.

Above them, all about them, was silence; only, somewhere in the blazing distance, a kokila-bird was sounding its single, inexpressive note; and the monotony of that sound was like an audible pulsation of the heat. While Gunevati's soft murmur ran on, an occasional puff of wind made the shade flicker and the grasses waver; and the monkeys on their perch opposite once more fell to

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searching in one another's fur. Jali's eyes dwelt deeply upon her. Deeply he studied the slender arch of her eyebrows, the small delicate nostrils, the exquisite curves of mouth and chin. 'She is like a gazelle,' he thought. 'One becomes like an animal or a houri when one is as perfect as that.'

He was attending to her words very little, but presently she became earnest and he had to listen more. She had just been making an augury, she told him; it was for a girl friend, who, after two years of marriage, had remained childless. What one had to do was to make up a ball of the combined excrement of husband and wife; (but it was no use unless you knew the appropriate charms; and they had to be recited without a single slip!) and then the ball had to be left for a week in a carefully chosen spot inside the temple grounds. Well, she had done all this; and to-day she had broken the ball open and found, to her great satisfaction, that it contained animal life. That meant that her friend need not despair; sooner or later a child would be conceived. 'And will it be a boy?' asked Jali. She sighed. Perhaps some clever person might be able to foretell even that, but her lore did not go so far. Anyhow there would be a child; and if her friend prayed regularly at this temple the god would in all probability make it a boy.

After this she went on to other things; she told him many curious tales to illustrate the godling's character. He had, apparently, a vein of puckishness in his composition; for instance, one woman, who had once bought him lettuce in the place of bilva-leaves, subsequently gave a birth to a rabbit. She was still defining the peculiarities of this and of her other favourite gods when Jali noticed that the sun was slanting in under the boughs and the evening already come. Now, too, from time to time, a bearer of offerings would go by and enter the temple to lay his tribute on the shrine. And, whether it was a man or a woman, each passer-by would turn to look curiously upon that pair. And every time this happened Jali was conscious that the meeting of the stranger's eyes with Gunevati's was different from their meeting with his — something occurred: the meeting was not just blank. At that his thoughts turned again upon himself, and his old-standing misery fastened upon him. Such loneliness as his must, he imagined, be quite unknown to Gunevati; for, assuredly, in a single moment she could establish contact with anyone in the world; and when she was by herself she enjoyed the watchful and interested company of at least a hundred gods.

THE profound contemplation under which he had held Gunevati in this their first meeting, prolonged itself into musings which were filled with the desire to see her again. That gaze of his, so dreamy and yet so intent, had been instinct with a two-fold wonder: wonder at her loveliness, and wonder at her outlook on the world. His spirit, in her presence, felt comforted and sustained. Looking into her eyes he looked into profound depths of animal serenity; it rejoiced him to sit peering into the warm dusk of that mind, where fancy unfolded and bloomed like orchids in the jungle-swamps of her native Malabar.

He never argued or contradicted or seemed to raise a doubt. It would have pleased him to believe all that she believed, even at its most absurd, even when her recitals became grotesque or horrible. Hers was a mind that one could take one's ease in, a veritable paradise of indolence and sensuous unrestraint. She had her guiding rules, it was true: one should do this; one should do that: — but they were splendidly irrational; there was no sense in them, nothing but arbitrary belief. No principles of any abstract ethic, no needfulness of self-government, did she know; and he could well imagine with what reproachful eyes she would look at anyone who should attempt to instruct her. Why this harshness, they would ask? Why go out of your way to make life vexatious and difficult?

If she was very unlike his own people, she was also very unlike the snobbish ladies of the Palace and their knowing maids. These, mistress and maid alike, were too much wrapped up in the world to spare time for the gods. Gunevati's religion, if you could call it that, permeated her whole existence, keeping pretentiousness and vulgarity right out of her range. She lived in the companionship of mystery. No detail of her life could be trivial or tiresome, since the present moment had the interest and importance of being so mysterious in what it was. Taking life simply, she found it to consist almost entirely of religion and sex. These by prescriptive right occupied the centre of her consciousness, and to her they were almost as one thing. But they were a unity with two aspects, one of which was terrifying and the other delicious. To his astonishment, and at first to his great consternation, Jali found that she took



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certain proclivities in his nature for granted. As early as at their second meeting, in fact as soon as she was quite at her ease with him, she became unblushingly enticing; she smiled up from under her lashes; she moved herself up close; she laughed and confided, she beguiled and insisted, until he could hold back no longer from what was, after all, the thing that he most greatly desired. Then, how entrancing she became! She was lascivious with the playfulness, the gentleness, and the modesty that only the truly lascivious know how to affect.

Later, when Jali had collected himself again, he returned to his first astonishment. How, he wondered, had she been able to divine his secret mind? Gunevati was much diverted by this perplexity. She made no mock, but the soft amusement that she betrayed was more illuminating than words. At first, indeed, in the matter of talk there was a great deal that went beside the mark, because Jali's vision of the world was quite as extraordinary to her as hers was to him. Soon, however, he saw that in the field of their present discussion she undoubtedly had the truth and the knowledge nearly all on her side; so that gradually his incredulity was overcome, and he arrived at the astonishing conclusion that, although she was without question, a very ill-educated, ignorant, and superstitious girl, yet her comprehension of human nature was a good deal deeper than his. Gunevati knew little, perhaps, but what she did know lay at the very heart of things; and then at last it dawned on him that he had been looking into the sky for plain truths that were lying on the ground at his feet. The veil of decorum that society habitually spreads over the instinct of sex was not after all so opaque but that he might have recognized what lay underneath. Then, too, he saw presently that Gunevati's version of things was not likely to be more fantastic or cynical than it need be. For the girl was not cynical; indeed she was positively naive. The world's conventions imposed on her; its formal distinctions, its pompous decrees, commanded her unquestioning respect. But, while prostrating herself in all humility before social greatness, she could not help remembering that even Rajahs and Emperors were males, and that as males they were simply complementary to her own lowly self. Great ladies, too, were women and as such had no secrets from her. Admittedly Gunevati was ignorant and unsophisticated; but the things she knew — and here it was that Jali paused and pondered and held his breath — the things she knew were marvellous and signified much.

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It was not easy to reconcile this new knowledge with the body of his previous experience; but he did a great deal of thinking, and one day, after much hesitation, he approached Gunevati with an idea. Why shouldn't he, he asked, put the truth of some of her pronouncements to the test? He couldn't help thinking that the Palace ladies offered an uncommonly promising field for experiment. Wouldn't it be interesting . . . ? Wouldn't it be possible . . . ? What did Gunevati think?

Gunevati burst into laughter, clapped her hands, and thought the idea splendid. It was with the greatest goodwill in the world that she set about coaching him up. She discoursed with high enthusiasm, and Jali listened with deep attention; she was very encouraging; what she said seemed too wonderful — almost unbelievable; nevertheless he took heart and believed.

This was by far the most heroic task that he had yet imposed upon himself. The courage with which he went to it was the courage of desperation; he was delivering his ultimate assault upon the disdainful world. The last few moments before his ordeal saw him pass from shivering terror into a mood of delirious audacity. The victim of his experiment was one of the prettiest serving maids, who had attracted him from the first. Nothing could have been more dashing than the attack he delivered, and he acquitted himself so well that the astonished girl was almost swept off her feet. Back in his room again, although now trembling and exhausted, he could not but see that his trial, although not conclusive, had been highly encouraging. The next day he followed up his advantage, and this time his triumph was complete. Nor was that enough; one victory did not suffice him. Inebriated by success, he determined upon another and a more ambitious venture. And again triumph was his!

These experiences were critical in his career; and a thoroughgoing readjustment of his ideas had now to take place. He was not yet quite sure — but he made bold to suspect — that the barrier between himself and the rest of mankind was at last laid low. He almost dared to believe that the cure for all his troubles, the magic password, was his at last. His respect for Gunevati's wisdom and his gratitude for her instruction soared to the utmost heights. He reported everything to her with exactitude, and together they laughed and rejoiced. Flattered by his extravagant esteem the girl became quite conceited and was almost ready to agree that her

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knowledge of human nature was unrivalled in the world. She continued to shower advice and instruction upon her pupil; and Jali, after drinking in every word, would hurry back to the Palace in order to prove her infallibility, and develop a new feature of his technique.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the change in his mental outlook. Not only did he find himself transformed, but everybody else seemed to be transformed as well. He lived in a state of ravishment; and it was the very excess of his self-confidence that carried him along without any serious check. The women of the Palace saw a tongue-tied, self-conscious boy most piquantly transformed into an impudent but charming young rake. They could not make it out. Amused glances and titters followed him. Scarcely more than a week ago, he had been unwanted and mis-esteemed; now he was a scandal and a delight.

When Jali found time to examine into what had occurred, he saw that just as in his relations with his parents he had developed an outward personality and a mode of behaviour that satisfied their requirements, so now he had chanced upon another mode of behaviour that his new audience could understand and appreciate. He had associated Gunevati's teachings with certain memories of a boy at home, who, for his age, was of a most enterprising ill-conduct, and, although he had only seen this boy once or twice in his life, he now suddenly found himself inspired to present a very good imitation of him. Thus, in a moment, he leapt into possession of ways and manners exactly suited to his chosen part.

These were splendid days. But the apex of his ambition, the summit of his glory, was not yet quite reached. Very soon after his arrival in the Palace he had been hopelessly captivated by a pretty, flighty young Ranee, who had not been slow to notice the effect she produced on him. It had amused Ranee Jagashri to slip him a few inviting smiles behind his mother's back; and more than once in her apartments she had encouraged him to be a good deal more enterprising than he knew how to be. But this had not lasted long; to his humiliation she had soon lost interest in him. Well, it was only to be expected. And those few drops of bitterness had not counted for much in the ocean of his misery at that time. Now it was different. Now, now he was not the man to sit down tamely under such a slight. So it was a very much altered Jali — a Jali flushed with conquering impudence, who presently laid siege at

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the lady's door. The little Ranee was wonderstruck; then greatly diverted; and finally, more out of amusement than anything else, she let him have his way.

For a period Jali simply didn't know himself any more. His old nature had suffered a complete eclipse. But, although gratified vanity and sensuality no doubt accounted for much in this change, their roots did not drive down very deep. More important in his present exultation was the belief that he had discovered the necessary bond between himself and the rest of mankind. No longer did he need to walk in fear of man's hostility or of woman's contempt; and thus, no longer oppressed by his old anguish, he believed that his old difficulties had vanished for good and all. By a natural reaction he now turned against most of his earlier opinions; the world was not a bad place after all; its grapes were not sour; to despise it was ridiculous; to fear it unnecessary.

He thought a great deal about Gunevati and the advantages of a simplified vision of the world. Not only was Gunevati's outlook much more easy and comfortable than his father's or his mother's, but it had brought him out of isolation into communion with the kindly race of man. Of course, when he looked at Gunevati through his father's eyes, he saw her as absurd. But surely his father in scorning Gunevati held nearly the whole of our ordinary human nature in scorn? Yes, for was it not the avowed aim of Buddhism to take all the colour out of life? But he was against this; he preferred life to be simple and highly coloured.

Apart from taste, too, Buddhism had never appealed effectively to his reason. Illusion, even as illusion, had to be accounted for; things were not imagined, that is to say, invented, or created, without there being some reason behind it. The things you found in the world were the creations of gods working through the imagination of men. If his father appealed to the effective force of disbelief in order to annihilate the world, Gunevati and her like preferred to use the effective force of belief in maintaining and extending the work of creation. Kali informed her and she informed Kali; it was all the same thing; and her Kali was assuredly as real as any of his father's abstract ideas. Wasn't it rather ingenuous of his father to put such faith in merely intellectual constructions? His father would find it very easy, no doubt, to make mock of poor Gunevati; but he, Jali, felt certain that she was the less simple of the two; she was merely simple-minded; his father was simple-natured.

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Gunevati stood nearer to the heart of things: this again was the burden of his thought when he compared her with his mother. In Gunevati there was no question of resorting to religion in order to find a meaning and justification for life, and still less was it a question of giving reality to religion by bringing it down into the homely business of the day. Every moment of her existence was charged with a superfluity of interest, which called and accounted for its religious significance. But in what, exactly, did that interest reside? In the body, in sex; and sex and religion were one. This position established Gunevati very firmly on life's bed-rock. It grounded her on the Actual, and made many of his mother's beliefs look far-fetched, many of her exigencies fanciful. Gunevati had no need to look into the past for a Saviour, not into the future for Heaven. She lived in her body, and her body was her present sufficiency.

There had often been moments in the past when Jali had nourished resentment against his parents for what he considered their unseeingness. Unreasonably enough, whilst taking infinite pains to delude them, he had resented their capacity for being deluded; and now, after emerging from his first intoxication, his feelings against them waxed strong. How completely they had ignored his spiritual development during these last few weeks! His fears and miseries, his efforts and despairs, his discoveries, his daring, and his triumphs — of all these they remained unaware. Moreover, were he to attempt to describe the course of his life to them they would not, he felt sure, understand it. And as little would they be able to understand Gunevati. They might imagine that they were capable of putting their prejudices aside and entering into her intelligence, but they would be mistaken. The imagination of adults was delusive; adults raised a thin intellectual ghost of comprehension, but further they could not go.

His parents' vision, Jali told himself, was just as limited as Gunevati's, but whereas hers was limited by ignorance, theirs was limited by an unconscious will to ignore. It even seemed to him that the actual experiences of a man's life were largely determined by his ingrained preconceptions. Certain things might happen to his uncle Hari, for example, which simply could not happen to his father. Fate fitted your world to your expectations — whether in a spirit of irony or of kindness, it was hard to say. And so, too, in his mother's case. He and she might live together side by side in the

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Agra Palace for years, but the worlds they would each be living in would be leagues apart. They would be different, not merely different in colour and atmosphere, but in the very events they contained. And here was an apt instance of what he meant. Not long ago his mother had missed an emerald ornament, a cross that had been given her by the Katholikos of Tiflis at the time of her baptism at home. Now, he had recently seen that cross in a drawer of Raneé Jagashri's dressing-table. And yet his mother believed (and, no doubt, was fated ever to believe) that Jagashri was a charming lady and her devoted friend. There, then, was a single example from among a score.

From all this a certain truth very plainly emerged: everyone living lived in a particular world of his own. There was his father's world, and his mother's world, and Gunevati's world — there was also, he supposed, the world of a tiger, and of a cobra, and of a little plant. And who was to say that one world was truer or more real than another? Some were richer than others, but all were equally real and true. The only creature in existence that lacked a vision, a personality, and consequently, a world of its own, was himself. But there was a compensation for this; his lack enabled him to see through the eyes of others. He could look at the world through Gunevati's eyes as well as through the eyes of his parents. Other people were limited by their own personalities and had not got this power.

FOR a time, then, Jali's life continued to be one of intense excitement — an excitement sometimes ecstatic, but never approaching very close to happiness. As soon as he became capable of collected thought he began to understand that his old problems, instead of disappearing, had only changed their shape. The trouble was that at bottom he remained exactly the same. Granted that if he was able to envisage the world as Gunevati envisaged it; still, he was quite unable to *feel* and *accept* the world as she felt and accepted it: that, he saw, would never be within his power. Her temperament was what it was because she had no other self behind; but, when he adopted her vision, he did it of set intent, and his own self lay behind, remaining absolutely unchanged.

Another aspect of the essential difference between him and her was brought out whenever he attempted to make her understand his parents' outlook on life. Their inborn tastes and distastes — for instance, their distaste for sensuality, their dislike of unreason and disorder — these were unintelligible to her; and although her purely intellectual deficiencies did not particularly vex him, he was unable to accept with the same equanimity her lack of moral taste. She had no appreciation of nobility of character; there was no poetry in her, nor anything worthy of the name of romance. If he could find beauty in her spontaneous aptitude for enjoying the gift of life, he couldn't give her much credit for that; it was a natural endowment for which she was not even grateful.

His attention was sharply directed to these shortcomings by her attitude towards Gokal. In accordance with his custom he was concealing from his parents the deep affection that he had conceived for his teacher, but he had not taken the same line with Gunevati. He had imagined that she must be responding with an affectionate gratitude to Gokal's continued kindnesses to her father and herself, and that she would be very ready to join him in love and respect for her benefactor. To his surprise, however, when he spoke admiringly of Gokal, Gunevati was unresponsive; she would look away through half-closed eyes and the curve of her lips seemed slightly derisive. Then again, in another matter she caused him decided annoyance; she showed an inclination to speak disrespect-

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fully of his parents. He could see that she took an unworthy pleasure in considering how grossly they were being deceived as regards the conduct as well as the character of their son. Nor was it worth his while to attempt to explain to her that there was something fine in such unawareness, something fine in the incapacity to suspect deceit. On these occasions he turned away from Gunevati with disgust, and some of that disgust would settle upon his opinion of himself as well. There were times now when it would have been easy for him to go further in this direction and become sentimental, indulge in repentances that would be only half sincere, and make confessions which he would afterwards regret. He had to remind himself that, although it was given to him to admire his parents for the quality of their vision, that vision was not his by nature's right. It was impossible for him to become like them, just as it was impossible for him to become like Gunevati. He was himself, unique — at once object and sublime.

As, little by little, he descended into this self-analytical way of thought, his former loneliness crept over him once more. He contemplated the unchangeableness of his inmost self and was appalled. Then, too, a kind of tidal wave of nostalgia for his lost innocence would sometimes sweep forward out of a serene sky and break over him with devastating effect. Never, never could you go back a single step on your way! Forgetting was no use; by forgetting you only wiped out the things that had happened; the *effect* of the things that had happened could never be wiped out.

The melancholy accompanying these reflections was accentuated by a very tender sentiment which he conceived at this time for a maid of Raneé Jagashri's. This was a humble little person with nothing in her appearance to distinguish her from many others, unless you were observant enough to notice the quality of her gaze. To Jali, at any rate, her eyes seemed to express a deep and intelligent wonder. In his fancy she became a counterpart of himself, the possessor of just those feelings that had haunted him from his infancy, making the world a place of marvels and terrors. To make advances to her never entered his head; that would have been a profanation; for his sentiment required only the lightest and most ethereal of sustenance. He watched her covertly day by day. She went about her business in the bustling, shrill-voiced throng with a shrinking quality which Jali ascribed not to timidity, nor pride, but to a natural fastidiousness. Around this unassuming figure he wove a



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veil of sentiment, unconsciously endowing her with all those traits in his own character that were being outraged by his present mode of life. It shamed him to be offering her the spectacle of his amours with her mistress. Before long he decided to break off with Ranee Jagashri; for the truth was that ever since his discovery of that lady's theft of his mother's emerald cross, he had disliked her, and hated himself for continuing the relationship.

In the natural course of things he informed Gunevati of his project, which included the stealing of the cross from Jagashri in order to put it back among his mother's jewels. After he had spoken, Gunevati slowly shook her head; she declared that what he proposed would never do; in the first place, the Ranee would be incensed by his breaking off; secondly, as soon as she saw the cross in his mother's possession once more, she would suspect his part in the affair. Her rage then would be terrible. No woman — certainly no great lady — would submit tamely to such an insult. Jali was very much put about; he argued a little, but without any confidence; and not for worlds would he have let Gunevati into the secret of his sentiment for the Ranee's little maid. At last he asked her mournfully what he was to do, and received the discouraging reply that he must wait until Jagashri tired of him.

At their next meeting Gunevati took up the subject again; there would be no objection, she said, to his stealing the cross and giving it to *her* — why not punish Ranee Jagashri by doing that? 'To you!' cried Jali, unspeakably outraged by the suggestion. But the next moment he blushed at his impoliteness and entered into evasive explanations. The question of Jagashri and the cross focused his malaise. He suffered both from a sense of disloyalty and from the feeling that he was trapped. Yes, he had entangled himself; and although his relationship with the Ranee (which, Gunevati assured him, might well come to an end any day) was bound to terminate with his departure from Agra, he took little comfort from this thought. The point was that his life was now set along a road of unconquerable habitude, with an endless series of snares, entanglements, and deceits upon the way. He appreciated, as he never had before, the beauty and enviability of his father's detachment and his mother's singleness of nature.

Soon, too, his relations with Gunevati became less smooth, for just as she was losing her awe of his social position, he was ceasing to be so greatly impressed by her reading of the heart of man. Nor

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was she slow to grasp this change, which caused her to resent all the more his modest attempts at improving her. A streak of common spite was apt to crop up in her now and then, a tendency to sneer at what she couldn't understand and to disparage the qualities she lacked. He had been prompt to check her tendency to speak slightly of his father and mother, but she made up for it in another direction. One day, when he was snubbing her for the same impertinent attitude in regard to Gokal, she turned upon him and administered so paralysing a blow that his powers of standing up to her on this particular ground were lost to him for ever. She assured him — and her assurances were circumstantial — that Gokal had been importuning her for some weeks past; and after his indignant incredulity had been overcome, she continued, out of sheer malice, to torment him with laughing descriptions of the actual scenes in which the Brahmin's infatuation had declared itself.

Jali was distressed beyond words. Was he shocked at the indignity of this behaviour in the man he so deeply revered? Was he jealous of Gokal? Or was he jealous of Gunevati? For hours and days he brooded, angrily probing his persistent pain. To his credit it may be said, however, that his loyalty to Gokal remained unshaken; he altered his conception of his friend no more than was necessary; his regard was not lessened, it was even enriched by an indulgence springing from a more sturdy love. Had not the truth that all men are human already been well driven into him by Gunevati herself?

Then, too, although the girl insisted that she had neither enticed Gokal nor yielded to him, Jali was shrewd enough to pass these protestations over with contemptuous disbelief. Gunevati's way was to declare that all men assailed her and that nearly all were scornfully repulsed. She was a liar, he knew. Quietly, therefore, and privately he accommodated himself to the idea that he and Gokal were now actually sharing her favours; and the fact that he was aware of this, whilst Gokal was not, began to inspire him with a new feeling of protective intimacy, a kind of secret complicity which was tintured with compassion. For how unworthy of Gokal this wretched girl was! A positive hatred of her would seize upon him when he pictured the wise and gentle Brahmin being tempted and beguiled. No doubt she had employed all her most shameless, shameful arts in order to drag him down.

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About this time an evil mood hung over Gunevatī, and day after day she gave herself the pleasure of angering him by making mock of Gokal. When this happened, such rage would seize upon Jali that he would fly from her presence and spend many hours vainly looking for a plan to expose her — without, at the same time, exposing himself.

As a natural consequence, too, his feelings for Gokal now became passionate, and often, while reclining at the Brahmin's feet, he would sing to himself a voiceless pæan of adoration. For him every fold of Gokal's robes was majestic, and his massive frame like a buttress of the earth. The lights and shadows of thought that played over Gokal's features were like movements of sun and cloud across the eternal hills. In that face each line had meaning; godlike was the intelligence that looked out at you from beneath the overhang of those brows. Gokal's eyes were filled with starlight; yet a network of delicate wrinkles bound them in common kindness to the world of men. And then, conjuring up the lithe, smooth-skinned loveliness of Gunevatī, he found it vacant and null. *Her* countenance with its purely surface beauty seemed emptier to him now than the pathetic animal faces of deer or gazelles. No longer could he read into it the appeal of wild and gentle mindlessness; he understood Gunevatī's mind too well, and now at last he knew that he disliked it.

The violence of his hostility did, however, moderate in a little while, and the two continued to meet on terms that seemed unchanged. But Gunevatī realized that she had a whip in her hand; and ever after this it pleased her to flick at him occasionally in order to assure herself of her power. As for Jali, he locked his anger away deep in his heart, where it went to feed the flame of his devotion to Gokal. It was with a strange mixture of emotions that he contemplated his approaching departure from Agra. He would feel, he now realized, an intense relief upon putting behind him all that complex of excitement, effort, and agitation that constituted his present life. But wouldn't he also feel dull? No! For Gokal was going to join him in the Hills; and there he would have Gokal all to himself — Gokal without Gunevatī.

He was not yet properly aware of it, but the strain of his present mode of life had already begun to tell upon him seriously. This was proved by an incident which nearly brought about his undoing. His mother had long wanted him to attend a service at Queen Miriam's chapel at Fatehpur-Sikri, but for one reason or another that event

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had been put off until now. And whereas, a few weeks ago, Jali would have had no objection to joining with his mother in her worship of the Christian God, the idea of doing so now filled him with the greatest discomfort. In the first place, he was afraid lest he should fail in devoutness. His mother had always insisted that her God was exceedingly benign; but Jali had it from other sources that He was keen-sighted, exacting, and jealous almost beyond belief — jealous to the point of not tolerating the worship of any other gods beside Himself! Might not the Christian God, then, piercing the secrets in his heart, look upon his attendance in the chapel as a piece of sheer impudence? Nor was this all: another misgiving assailed him. Doubtful of his powers of self-control, he feared lest he should make some dreadful self-betrayal. What if he were to break down and confess everything?

Anyhow, there was no way of avoiding the ordeal. So it was with as cheerful an air as he could muster that he accompanied his mother to Fatehpur-Sikri and entered the chapel at her side. For the first few minutes he felt very hysterical, but scarcely had the music begun before he forgot himself, his spirit being caught up in a sense of worship so spontaneous and complete, that no consciousness of guilt or hypocrisy remained. No longer did he think of the Christian God as prone to anger. He yielded himself to an ineffable longing for the peace of beauty, and the beauty of peace. The beauty of Mary's Heaven, the beauty that lay upon the line of desert horizons — the beauty of sanctity and the far ideal — all this, this that he had forgotten, returned to him in a surge of emotion which was only endurable for as long as he kept the thought of himself, as he now was, out of his mind. But he could not keep that thought at bay for ever. All at once regret assailed him with overpowering force. He beat it down, he strove not to listen to the passionless voices of the choir, nor to understand the cold beatitude they expressed. And yet the music that was tormenting him must also have been a support; for, when it ceased, he dropped into a pit of despair. The light by which men live seemed to abandon him entirely; a black wave of faintness rushed upon him, and he yielded to it with thankfulness.

For the next two days, lying almost without movement upon his bed, he exaggerated his sickness of body, and by this means concealed the sickness of his mind. The temptation to make a confession was very strong, so that at moments he was within an ace of yielding

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unpleasurable: it was not until later, when he was lying wakefully on his bed at night, that every feeling except anxiety faded out of his mind. Then, then, indeed a thousand fears assailed him. He had no confidence in his ability successfully to conceal from Gunevati his dismay at her coming. His fear of her and his desire of her would doubtless conspire to make him return to their former relationship. The idea came, too, that she might succeed in poisoning Gokal's mind against him. With these thoughts working feverishly in his brain, he got up and stood for a while looking down upon the golden-brown bodies of his two friends, the cat-bears, who were lying asleep in their basket. His heart ached just as if he were being unexpectedly compelled to take leave of them for ever.

The next morning he went into the yard at the back of Gokal's bungalow, and there he found Gunevati sitting on the steps of an outbuilding that had evidently been prepared as her quarters. She was brushing her hair and drying it in the sun. On the other side of the yard was Gokal's cook, busy before the cook-house, and it was to him first that Jali discreetly went up. Whilst exchanging greetings with the cook he examined Gunevati out of the tail of his eye; and very soon he felt over his whole body the glow of a sensation that he recognized only too well. In vain he turned his back; desires that had lain dormant since his departure from Agra flooded his brain with images of the girl's beauty and ready wantonness. But his sensuality was now embittered by a deeply-rooted dislike. Nevertheless, while he cursed her in his heart, his desires were also prompting him to suppress that dislike; thus whilst pretending to listen to the cook, he was filled with a deep interior agitation. A strange and rather suspect gentleness began to suffuse his thoughts of Gunevati as he reflected upon the pleasures that she afforded Gokal, — pleasures that he could intimately appreciate. Gunevati was a subtle, secret link between Gokal and him; the gestures, glances, tricks of behaviour, that charmed him — these all charmed Gokal too. And so a kind of fragrance was infused into his desire, and again a protective feeling entered into his understanding of the Brahmin's infatuation. Alas! if only Gunevati were not so unworthy! If only she could recognize nobility when she met it! But she was neither intelligent nor trustworthy; he had just overheard his father saying that it was madness on Gokal's part to have brought her here.

The sense of her dangerousness grew upon him as he stood there.

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She was a thing of allurements and danger — not only to Gokal and to him, but to all the world. In so far as she was unconscious of being a peril she was more evil still. Yet — why should a pretty, unthinking girl inspire these sentiments? Was it fair to her to interpret her thus? Would not a good Buddhist see in her only a link in the long karmic chain, and a Christian only a sister in God? Oh, but those conceptions of her, how far-fetched they seemed! how flagrantly they ignored the immediate, blood-stirring reality! She had no life, no being, no reason, except in sex; and she herself felt it. She was a living bait — a bait of the dark, merciless Kali.

He walked across the yard, acutely conscious that the cook's eyes were fixed upon him. The old man's presence compelled Gunevati to rise deferentially and give him a proper salute. He was pleased, and waited a few moments before motioning her to sit down again. But there was a smile in her eyes, which the cook could not see, and the humility of her attitude did not disguise her pride in her lovely body, her glowing consciousness of its beauty and of its lure.

'You never believed the Brahmin would bring me,' she murmured. 'But now you see!'

He was silent.

'The Brahmin loves me more than ever. Look!' and she held out an arm covered with bracelets.

'Very pretty,' said Jali, turning his face away.

Her slender figure arched in a backward pose, she smiled up at him, and her braceleted arm shielded her eyes from the sun. His gaze was drawn back to her, but he could find nothing to say.

'When have I ever lied to you?' she went on. 'Perhaps you would like to believe that the holy Brahmin loves me as a father? But, I tell you, the loves of old men are the most unholy of all.'

'Our house,' said Jali, 'is on the other side of the little stream. One can see it through the trees.'

'I know,' said Gunevati.

'Half a mile above it there is a place where three paths meet.' He paused and gulped. 'I will meet you there to-morrow at noon.'

Gunevati said nothing. She was looking down at the delicate skin on her own shoulder, and it seemed to inspire her with a kind of mournful tenderness. Her tone, when she spoke again, was petulant. 'By my mother, this country is lonely and horrible beyond words! These dark trees! And the air, how cold! Who but *rishis* or demons

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could endure to live in this place! All others who come here of their own free will must indeed be mad.'

In his heart Jali was inclined to agree with her, but he was also angered, as she intended he should be. And his anger seemed only to increase his desire. Her eyes, as she looked at him, became mocking.

'I know you,' she said. 'You are longing to take me in your arms' — and her laugh rang out. — 'Only, like a child, you are ashamed to say it.'

Flushing hotly, Jali took a glance at the cook, who, crouching over his brazier, pretended not to have heard that laugh. Had the cook not been there, thought Jali, his anger would assuredly have broken out. As it was, he turned and walked quickly out of the yard.

On the morrow they met; and, after this, secret meetings in the forest became customary; but, whilst yielding to his desires, he tried to persuade himself that he might still avoid falling back into the old intimacy. If Gokal was able to use Gunevati for his pleasure, and yet preserve (as Jali supposed he did) a tranquil independence of spirit, why should not he do likewise? The unreflective arrogance of this reasoning was balanced by an equally unreflective modesty; it did not occur to him that Gunevati might set some store by their former companionship and be piqued by his new attitude. In point of fact she was piqued. Her ascendancy over the young Rajah had been flattering to her, and it annoyed her to see that, while her spell over his senses still held, her former influence was quite gone. If great men and powerful could be totally enslaved through their senses, why not this child? She pondered over the riddle until the answer came. She had won her ascendancy over Jali by opening his eyes to new aspects of life, and it was only by perpetually ministering to the hunger of that youthful, restless intelligence that she could hope to hold him in thrall. How tiresome it was! Was the boy worth the trouble? She swore that he was not; and yet she began to scheme how to get him back. As a first measure she made a trial of denying him her favours; and then, when this did no good, she came to realize that he lived less in his senses than in his heart, and that his heart was less swayed by his senses than by his thinking mind. With resentment, if not with jealousy, she awoke to a full understanding of the importance of Gokal in his life; and she was angered to a degree that she could not easily account for. This fat

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old man and this silly boy, what were they to her? Nothing, less than nothing! Yet the next time she and Jali met she sharpened her tongue, and was more spiteful in her mockery of Gokal than ever before. The result was highly significant; Jali turned livid with rage and finally went so far as to assure her that the pleasures he found in her arms were as nothing compared to the deep happiness of his hours at the Brahmin's side.

This was much the most serious quarrel they had yet had, and its consequences, although indirect, were decisive. Gunevati made up her mind to play her trump cards. She knew that she could tell Jali things that would reawaken all his former interest in her, and more than restore her lost prestige. If she had abstained until now, it was because her story was not one that could be lightly told. It involved the revelation that she was a Vamachari, a Follower of the Left-Hand Way, and at this time, when the Emperor's rage against the secret sects was in full flame, no more dangerous disclosure could possibly be made. But it was also just this revelation that would raise her to heights of wonder and interest in Jali's eyes.

Once or twice already, when she had hinted at an unusual knowledge of forbidden things, his response had showed her where her best opportunities lay. She understood that knowledge, and especially the idea of hidden knowledge, fascinated him. Never had she met anyone before so sensitive to the underground murmurs and stirrings of the passion, half-religious, half-erotic, which dominated the spirit of her race; and that sensitiveness seemed to have been accentuated rather than diminished by the refinements of his character and upbringing.

The next day she made him accompany her farther than usual into the forest, and when they were seated together in a remote, sunny glade, she made her first beginning. On the purely material side, her tale, as she was well aware, could hardly fail to thrill him. He had often spoken to her about his Uncle Hari, a figure who evidently had touched his sympathies. Well, wouldn't it interest him to hear how Hari had run across her and the other members of her confraternity as they were stealing along, one evening in the summer, to their appointed meeting-place in the Agra Woods? and wouldn't he be excited at hearing that Hari had had a companion, and that his companion had accidentally ridden down a certain member of her group? Yes! and the rider had been the



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Princess Lalita, the betrothed of Prince Daniyal! And the man knocked down and stunned had been no other than Prince Salim himself! Oh, the story in its barest particulars would be thrilling.

So here they now were; and she had not gone far before she saw Jali's eyes light up and fix upon her with breathless intensity. His rapt stare told her that she had not over-estimated her powers. On that afternoon, and over a long sequence of afternoons, Jali did indeed hang upon her words. The method she followed was one of hints, broken sentences and long obstinate pauses; but every now and then she would come out with a little rush of succinct, definite information, allaying his irritation and binding his interest once more. Many were the hours they spent in that glade, and Gunevati, basking upon the warm pine needles and smiling mysteriously to herself, was now fully content. The hunger of those two dark eyes fixed upon her was more flattering to her vanity than that other hunger with which she was already a little wearisomely familiar.

It was not long ago that Hari Khan had arrived in Khanjo, and Jali had noticed at once that he was not in his usual spirits. Gunevati provided an explanation: the Princess Lalita, she said, had broken off her affair with him and he was suffering from heart-sickness. Explaining this, she laughed unkindly; she had no love for his uncle, and gave as her reason that he had not scrupled to take advantage of her defencelessness after discovering her in the deserted bungalow. But one day she also murmured something about his having spoken evil of her to Gokal; and then later, she came out with the astonishing remark that it was probably Hari Khan who had reported her to Mabun Das.

To Jali the conversation that took place between them on that afternoon was of particular importance, because it arrested a spirit of incredulity that had been gathering in him, and forced him to recognize Gunevati as actually playing a part — obscure, but none the less influential — in the affairs of the great world. She had already told him that Prince Salim was in love with her and that this infatuation greatly exercised the mind of Mabun Das; but these statements had left no impression on him at the time. The occurrence of such imposing names in Gunevati's narrative had done little more, so far, than spread an air of unreality over it; he hadn't been able to accept it as true that the busy Mabun Das knew or cared anything about a girl like this. But here she was reaffirming the fact, and this time he meant to probe a little.

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'I used to see Mabun Das very often at the Agra Palace,' he said slowly. 'I don't think I liked him very much, although he was always so polite. He never seemed to be really listening to what anyone said — not even to my father.'

'He listened to *me*!' said Gunevati with a low laugh.

Jali again was amazed. Was she actually claiming to have had an interview with the great man himself? He fixed her upon a deeply mistrustful gaze.

It happened to be one of Gunevati's more communicative days, and perhaps Jali's silence piqued her. At any rate, she presently raised herself upon one elbow and gave him a little grimace. 'You doubt me,' she said. 'You doubt whether I really ever saw Mabun Das. Well!' and she gave him a peculiar smile. 'Do you remember the marks on my back?'

'I do.'

Sitting up, she gave her shoulders a twitch that caused her light muslin dress to slip down to her waist. 'Look at those old marks,' she went on craning round herself, to examine the amber-coloured smoothness of her skin. 'Don't you remember asking me how I got them?'

Jali bent forward. 'The marks are quite gone now.'

'But you remember them?'

'Yes. You told me it was your father who did it.'

'You know my father. How could you believe that such a mild old man would beat me like that? No; those marks were the work of Mabun Das himself.'

Jali knitted his brows in silence, while she laughed with a queer, soft complacency. 'It was like this,' she told him. 'One day, when I and my father were out, Mabun Das's spies came and searched our cottage; and they found Princess Lalita's riding whip, which I had hidden in the reed thatch of the roof. But I knew nothing of their visit; and the next day, when Mabun Das summoned me before him, of course I denied all knowledge of the whip. And then, all at once — O my mother! I could have died! — Mabun Das drew forth the whip and flourished it before my eyes. And when I shrank away he bade me come quite close. And then he struck me three times. And with the first blow he said: "This is to teach you there is one man on earth that you must never lie to." And with the second blow he said: "This is to make you remember that your life is in my hands." And with the third: "This is to warn you that for

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the rest of your life my eye will be on you and my ear listening to everything you say”.’

Whilst she was speaking Gunevati's eyes had changed; and now Jali saw in them a darkness that he had never seen before. With an intake of breath the girl swept her glance round the enclosing circle of trees. Jali's gaze went round too; and there was a pause before he said: 'I think — I think you had better keep those words of Mabun Das's well in your mind.'

This was a chapter in Gunevati's life that left Jali thoughtful, but it did not engage his interest for long. Affairs of the great world, affairs social and political, he felt to be quite outside his competence. So, although he vaguely conceived that the incidents related by Gunevati were such as might interest Mabun Das (for instance, it wouldn't do, of course, for Akbar to find out that Prince Salim was a Vamachari, nor for Daniyal to find out that Hari Khan had been conducting an intrigue with his betrothed) — although he realized that these scandalous secrets were potentially of political importance, this aspect of them remained indifferent to him. What, first of all, fascinated him in Gunevati's story was its revelation of the essential secrecy of the human mind. In his egoism he had been prone to fancy that he alone possessed vital secrets. But this clearly was a mistake. Here was his Uncle Hari, living an adventurous, hidden life! of which the world knew nothing, a life of which Gunevati probably only knew a part, and that only because chance had made her hidden life cross Hari's at a certain point. How astonishingly secret most human lives in all probability were! Here were his father and mother, and Gokal, and Hari, and Gunevati, and himself, all living closely together, all participating, as it seemed, in an open, common life, and yet without doubt each one of these minds contained profound secrets. Each contained a small and partial knowledge of a single body of fact, which in its entirety was known by no one on earth.

A few days later he expressed some part of these reflections to Gunevati; but, as always happened when he generalized, she failed to show an interest. In order to come down to the particular: 'Do you suppose,' he asked, 'that my father and mother, for instance, know things about you that you would never imagine possible, or other things about Hari Khan which you do not know? And what would happen in the world if people could see into one another's minds?'

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Gunevati laughed, and gave a small shrug.

'Tell me!' persisted Jali.

The girl yawned. 'I can tell you one thing that your mother knows and that Rajah Amar does not know,' said she, suddenly looking amused.

'What is that?'

'That Hari Khan has become her lover.'

'Oh! — What makes you think that?' said Jali, taken aback. 'Besides,' he added a moment later, 'what of Princess Lalita? I think you must be joking.'

'No. I am not joking. Don't you know that they have been meeting every day down by the stream?'

'Yes,' said Jali. 'But . . .'

He broke off. It would be a waste of time to set out to convince Gunevati that the relationship might be innocent. Besides, it was not a matter he would care to hear her discuss. Not that he was particularly angry or shocked; he had accepted the possibility that what she said was true. Only, oddly enough, he was not very deeply interested; and the reason for this was that, having grown up to think of his parents as beings apart, he was unable to look upon the things that happened to them as having the same kind of significance that they would have if they were to happen to him. In matters affecting his parents he could not conceive that ordinary human feelings were involved, or human standards applicable. Whenever he was forced to recognize in his father or mother feelings similar to his own, he experienced a certain discomfort. If he was learning to regard other adults as humanly akin to himself, he was still unconsciously reluctant to do the same for his parents, and this because his sense of responsibility towards them would thereby be increased.

So the principal effect of Gunevati's allegation was to heighten the feelings that her other disclosures had given birth to. The world was an extraordinarily mysterious place; the lives of men were secret; and the deeper you dug down the more strange and alluring the arcanum of Spirit became.

GUNEVATI's expectations were justified, and better than she knew. After Jali's first excitement was over, he retained an intense curiosity to penetrate into the dark background of religion and passion against which her characters moved. Moreover, his imagination, working upon the material offered, drew not a little of its inspiration from sources of which she had no knowledge.

A little more than a year ago he had accompanied his father on a journey through the steamy jungle-lands of the South, and that experience had made a lasting impression on him. In particular he now recalled the dark, the time-worn, the blood-stained temples of the region, temples that were the true homes of Kali. And was it not from the South that the golden-hued Gunevati herself came?

So this pretty girl stretched out at his side in the cool Himalayan shade was seen by him as an incarnation of a dark and dreadful power; a power that, whilst secretly ruling over the whole earth, preferred not to reveal itself in its mighty nakedness to any but the initiates of its ancient home. While she sang to herself, and yawned, and played with the fir-cones, he would sit apart, gazing at her fixedly, from out of a cloud of thought

In what rites had Gunevati not participated? What ecstasies, what savage deliriums had she not witnessed? What mysteries had she not gazed upon with her childishly cynical eyes? Alas! he could not make her mind yield up its secrets, secrets which she herself probably only half-understood. Now and then, in the night-time, it seemed to him that he might yet of his own strength, enter into direct communication with the demiurgic forces that were haunting him — forces whose colossal forms he felt heaving against the unsubstantial veil of the visible world. Unceasingly he was obsessed by the thought of a secret knowledge that it was his destiny to make his own. He must learn, and learn, and learn; he must learn not only the things that his father knew and the things that Gokal knew, but the things that Gunevati knew; and then more, much more — all that still lay beyond.

Before long he was beseeching Gunevati to make arrangements for his initiation into her secret sect; and in the end, for the sake of peace, the girl went so far as to introduce him to some friends that

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she had made in the village. These people, although not Vama-charis, were adherents of a similar cult. Amongst them was one who excited Jali's particular curiosity, because he also belonged to the infamous brotherhood of Aghoris. But after this creature had shown himself off by eating a mixture of putrid offal and dead insects out of a human skull, Jali's stomach proclaimed itself weaker than his spirit. To state the case frankly, there was not one of Gunevati's new friends who did not strike him with spiritual, if not physical, nausea. These people might be traffickers in the mysterious and the unhallowed, but they were certainly very squalid as well. Nor did Gunevati herself appear to any advantage in their society; her complete want of fastidiousness became manifest; and when he and she and her friends were together, it became all too plain where the true affinities lay. For him and for his people she had no instinctive sympathy at all; it was to the villagers that she turned, and they were truly detestable.

On her side, it was not long before Gunevati saw that she had made a mistake in allowing reality to interfere with Jali's imaginings. But how could she have managed differently? And what line was she to take now? Abruptly her mood changed; impatience with Jali flared up in her; all the boredom that she had been staving off assailed her with redoubled force. Was she to waste all her youth in this wilderness, bereft of all admirers excepting a fat old man and an exacting boy? Besides — and this was what really piqued her — between the man and the boy there was a friendship in which she had no place.

It had now become a rule for Jali to spend his morning hours with Gokal in the veranda, and before long Gunevati saw that this offered her a new method of offence. She succeeded in making Gokal think that she was developing an interest for serious things, and thus inveigled him into admitting her to these sessions whenever she chose to come. To Jali her presence was intolerable; he rightly saw it as intended to be outrageous and insulting to both. From the first day that she put in an appearance his peace of mind was gone. He could never tell when she might not come gliding softly round the side of the house, to seat herself with an exaggerated demureness upon the veranda's lowest step. He would pretend to take no notice of her arrival, and as a rule Gokal would do the same. His eyes would remain fixed upon the Brahmin's face, and the latter would make no pause in his speech. But oh! the mockery

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of it! How lamentably self-conscious they both were! In agony Jali would wait for a stumble, a faltering, a change — however slight — in the speaker's voice. Very rarely, if ever, did Gokal succeed in passing successfully through the ordeal. Besides, what was the use, when the victory was bound to go to Gunevati in any case? For, if Gokal did succeed in ignoring her silent presence, she had a dozen different devices at her command for exposing his secret disarray. It was enough that she should raise her bosom in a sigh, or sway to one side in pretended alarm at the buzzing of a wasp. Any trick sufficed: Gokal would interrupt himself and turn to her with a caressing look, and speak some friendly word. To Jali the slightest incident of this kind was tremendous in significance. The tumult in his breast continued to rage for long after the Brahmin had resumed his discourse; and well Gunevati knew how it was.

In these days the antagonism between the two rapidly deepened, and although Jali never fully revealed his feelings, his meetings with the girl became less frequent and their relations increasingly strained. If he still occasionally yielded to his desires, and if Gunevati was still cynically complaisant, that physical intimacy counted for nothing.

There had been a moment not long ago when Jali had thought seriously of taking his uncle into his confidence. It was true that he had sworn to Gunevati not to betray her; but he argued to himself that his loyalty to his own people should come first. Was it fair to Hari not to report to him upon matters in which he was closely concerned? He felt strongly that it was not. Then, too, the idea of making a confession was now less unpleasant to him than before, for his own personal secrets were, in some sort, balanced by the secrets that he had learned about Hari. His strongest inducement; however, resided in the fact that Hari's attitude towards Gunevati was by no means friendly, and he was disposed to think that his disclosures might lead to Gunevati's being sent away.

The decision before him was a momentous one, and he was still weighing it in his mind when the girl herself unknowingly tipped the scales. Her careless, confident assertion that his mother and Hari had become lovers drove all idea of a confession out of his head. Without fully believing all she said, he could see for himself that those two had drawn very closely together; and that, by itself, when he considered it, was enough to change his mind. Hitherto his uncle had occupied an exceptional position in his thoughts as a grown-up

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person with whom it might be possible to stand on terms of confidence. Hari's love affair with the Princess Lalita had not altered his conception of him, for the Princess (he had seen her once or twice at Agra) was just a pretty young woman with whom anyone might well have an affair; but to have an affair with his mother was quite a different matter; it snatched you up and away into the remote realm where his parents belonged.

Nevertheless, it was not without regret that he abandoned his plan; and after that, as the evil traits in Gunevati's character grew more conspicuous every day, the loneliness of his position came to press with increasing weight upon his mind. Not content with spoiling his lesson-hours, Gunevati now went back to her old habit of abusing Gokal to him, and what roused his especial disgust was her present tendency to select, not the Brahmin's weaknesses but his goodness of heart, and even his very affection for her, as the target for her spiteful shafts. Latterly, too, she had got into the way of questioning him about his parents, and her tone was never pleasant. For them, for Hari, for Gokal, she evidently nourished distinct strains of active dislike; these were the sentiments that he saw flickering up, like summer lightning, out of the gloomy boredom of her life at Khanjo.

A powerful longing to escape from this remote valley now obsessed him, just as it did her. The Himalayan scene had never had any charms for him, and his aversion to it was fast becoming intense. He could not endure these confining mountain slopes muffled in sombre trees, the meagre sky-space, the absence of a horizon. The people of the valley, too, were filled with the dull, instinctive malevolence of an inferior race. This was brought home to him by a small adventure that befell him at about this time. He was returning from a ramble by himself through the woods, when a low whimpering struck upon his ear; and, while he stood still, trying to discover whence the sound arose, the conviction gained upon him that a woman or child must have met with an accident, and was now lying helpless somewhere under the dark trees. Frantic to bring aid, he called out and began running hither and thither. At last he came upon a pit; and looking down, saw a bear-cub lying wounded below. It was not the kind of bear that would eat the garden produce of the villagers or do them any harm; yet, as he was staring down at it in helpless pity, a large stone was dropped from above striking the poor animal on its side. Moreover,



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the ground all round the bear was strewn with similar stones, not one of them heavy enough to have killed it. And now, lifting his head, he saw for the first time one of the village women with two or three children about her, grinning at him from the other side of the pit. With rage in his heart he shouted out at them, and asked how long the bear had been in its present plight. The indifferent answer came 'About a week'. At this his anger knew no bounds, and, after driving the bear's tormentors away, he made straight for Gokal's house. But his uncle Hari, whom he was looking for, happened not to be in when he got there, so he plunged headlong into Gokal's private room. The fact that Gunevati was lying on the couch, and that his sudden entry had thrown Gokal into obvious confusion, did not suffice to arrest him. Describing what he had seen, he begged that men should be sent out in all haste to put an end to the bear-cub's miseries.

As soon as Gokal had grasped the situation he showed no lack of feeling; but for a few moments Jali's breathless incoherence had merely bewildered him, and unconsciously he had turned to Gunevati with an air of appealing to her for help. The girl's response had been to raise puzzled eyebrows and shake her head; but, not a moment before, Jali had caught her eye, which was fixed upon him with a look of the most malicious amusement. This behaviour goaded him to frenzy. 'As for you!' he shouted at her in a voice of undisguised hate: 'You are playing the hypocrite again! You must have known about that bear all the time. It was your friend, the lame boy, who threw down the rock.'

This outburst was followed by a silence, and Jali realized that the tone in which he had just addressed Gunevati must have struck Gokal as decidedly odd. But before anything further could be said, a servant came into the room, and to him Gokal now gave the necessary orders for the bear-cub's immediate destruction. While this was going on, Gunevati, from behind Gokal's back, continued to eye Jali with the same looks of wicked amusement; but, when the servant had gone, she came forward, and in a tone of meek distress protested that she had been quite innocent of the knowledge that had been imputed to her. Then, after inclining herself before the young Rajah with dignified humility, she quietly left the room.

As soon as she was gone an embarrassed silence fell. To Jali's relief it was broken by the coming of another servant, who was bringing him some lemonade to drink, and a basin in which to

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wash his hands and face. This done, he waited with averted eyes for Gokal to speak. His heart was beating hard, and he knew that, should an opportunity be given him, he would be unequal to resisting the temptation to make everything known. Obstinate as he kept his face turned away, but he was aware that Gokal's troubled gaze was resting heavily upon him. A few critical moments passed, moments in which the future course of affairs might have been wholly changed. But it was not to be. The Brahmin hesitated, and the reasons for his hesitation were numerous and complicated. Some were less creditable to him than others; but it was certainly not the less creditable alone that formed his ultimate decision. What he did was to ask his pupil whether it was not true that he had latterly taken Gunevati in aversion. His voice was very embarrassed, and further than this he could not force himself to go. Jali replied curtly: 'Yes,' and then, after another painful silence, Gokal went on: 'Very well; if that is the case she shall no longer join us in the morning.'

Shortly after this they parted, and the cloud of their discomfort had not yet lifted, but neither of them was seriously disturbed about it, for they both knew that their amity remained unspoil. On his way home Jali felt a certain elation; for had not Gunevati suffered a reverse?

That reverse turned out to be less complete than it should have been. On the pretext of picking flowers for the decoration of Gokal's room, Gunevati would often saunter out into the sunlight of the garden while Gokal's discourse was going on. Now stooping down, now reaching up, she was able to display the grace of her young body more provocatively even than before. Her beauty travelled like a poisonous perfume into the shade of the veranda where master and pupil sat.

Such was Jali's position when fate gave another turn to the wheel, a turn which he at once felt to be menacing. Quite unexpectedly Rajah Amar was called away from Khanjo to attend his aged mother's death-bed; and, to everyone's surprise, Hari elected to accompany him. It was a grey, autumnal morning upon which the two rode off, and as Jali watched them disappearing under the trees, a new cloud of apprehension settled down upon his heart. From this hour onwards a vague fear, a sense of gathering evil, scarcely ever left him. What exactly he was afraid of he would have been unable to say; but he could not forget the bear-cub in the pit,

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and he knew that in just the same spirit the villagers would welcome any misfortune that might befall the strangers within their gates. They would refuse the ordinary offices of mercy; gloating, they would hold back. These were the people with whom Gunevati stood in instinctive sympathy, and even perhaps in some kind of secret alliance.

Under the stimulus of fear his insight was sharpened. He began to understand much better the nature of Gunevati's discontent. Each one of the brief days of her youth and beauty was to her a priceless treasure, and in handfuls that treasure was being thrown away. An old saying, recently quoted by Hari, cropped up in Jali's mind: 'A woman measures her beauty by the evil that it works in the world.' Where were the rich and handsome lovers, and with them the dissensions, intrigues, and murders, that Gunevati had a right to see enlivening her path? For long hours Jali sat upon his bed and meditated. It was disquieting to recall the expression of disdainful boredom that was habitual to Gunevati when Gokal's eyes were not actually resting upon her. It was dreadful to remember how Gokal's face would light up with tenderness whenever she passed by.

AMONGST Gunevati's friends in the village lower down in the valley was a herb-woman, whose position among the natives was remarkable, for although they looked upon her as little better than an outcast, she dominated them by the force of her personality. Her offices were sought for at childbirth, in sickness, in affairs of the heart, and at death. No doubt her intelligence was very superior to that of the others, but this did not seem to excite their hatred; perhaps they considered that she atoned for it by the unusual repulsiveness of her appearance and habits. Her hut, which she had been compelled to build at some distance from the village, emitted a stench that was different from theirs, and which even they found unpleasant.

Jali had some difficulty in understanding what made Gunevati associate with this woman, for she did not naturally incline towards the poverty-stricken, nor was intelligence any special recommendation to her. Once or twice out of sheer curiosity he questioned her about Mujatta the Cockroach as this woman was called, and rather to his surprise she betrayed a slight, but unmistakable, embarrassment. She took the line of denying the intimacy, yet he had no doubt in his mind that it existed. Not only had he overheard the village women coupling her name derisively with Mujatta's, but, one day, as he was wandering by himself in the forest, he had come out unexpectedly into a clearing which he recognized as the herb-woman's, and had seen Gunevati standing by the door of the hovel, deep in conversation with someone inside. Not wishing to be seen, he had watched her for a few moments from the shade of the trees and then slipped quietly away.

This was some time ago, and meanwhile he had not given Mujatta more than a passing thought, yet now it happened that, waking one night from a deep sleep, he was seized with the sudden conviction that Gunevati and this woman were hatching mischief together. Moreover, as he lay there, staring into the dark, his dread rapidly took a more definite form; it seemed to him that the village women had used the word 'poison'; and then he suddenly remembered that very soon after Gunevati's arrival at Khanjo she herself had laughingly told him that Mujatta was a noted poisoner. In a

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very few minutes he was entirely possessed by the dreadful idea that Gunevati was making up her mind to poison Gokal.

No more sleep was possible for him that night. Hour after hour he lay rigid in his bed, his body frozen and shivering, while his mind strained and laboured in a torment of anguished conjecture. His task was to collect, review, collate and interpret every detail that might have some bearing on the affair. Each one of Gunevati's looks, words, and actions during the past weeks had to be considered and weighed. And then he had to penetrate her mind; his speculations must carry him to the truth, and the certainty that he had found the truth.

At some point in the midst of this brain-racking labour he got up and went to the window; and when he next became conscious of his surroundings it was to find himself standing there, in a patch of moonlight, with his friends, the cat-bears, roused from their sleep and snuffling at his heels. Automatically he put them back into their basket and returned to bed. Dawn glimmered into the room, and he was still in the same condition; but, as the day brightened and the household stir began, his fears lost their first panic intensity. He no longer felt that instant action was obligatory; he could allow himself time to deliberate — say, twenty-four hours — before doing whatever had to be done.

And what might that be? In God's name, what? Were it in his power to kill Gunevati by a mere act of will, she would be dead, he told himself in the very next second; and not one scruple or misgiving would he have. Well! wasn't it, then, mere cowardice that prevented him from taking the necessary steps to bring about what he desired. 'I must think!' he muttered. 'I must think!'

Having given out that he was suffering from a headache, he continued to lie on his bed; and, as he wrestled with the dreadful decision that was gradually imposing itself upon him, his teeth once more began to chatter with cold and fear. The action before him called for a violation of his instincts more cruel than any he had yet attempted. It was even worse than setting out to make advances to the women in the Palace. To bring about Gunevati's death — even with the expert assistance of the herb-woman — was going to be an agony, a torture. Each step of his plan, as he pictured himself in the performance of it, filled him with a sickening horror. But he saw no real difficulties in his way. Mujatta was ruled solely by the love of gain; it was well known by everyone that there was nothing

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she would not do, no one she would not betray, for the sake of an extra coin. And, although Gunevati might, thanks to Gokal, be in a position to pay her well for her services, he, Jali, could without question pay her far better. He felt sure that as soon as he had made the foul creature see what was in his mind she would put herself at his disposition with a shameless alacrity. After all, too, some danger attached to doing away with a Brahmin, but no one (unless it were Gokal) would make much ado about Gunevati's death.

As the morning wore on he fell into an uneasy sleep, and, awaking about noon, found himself much more collected. Twenty-four hours was the period that his father allotted to himself for solitary meditation before confirming a sentence of death, and he determined to follow his father's example. Stretched out motionless in the green twilight of his shaded room, he strove hard to reach the detached, dispassionate firmness that he desired. The cat-bears, considerably perplexed by their young master's unaccountable behaviour during the last twelve hours, padded gently about on the matting, occasionally putting their forepaws upon the bed in order to take a look into his face. Jali found his thoughts ungovernable. Instead of concentrating on the question of Gunevati's deserts, he lost himself in wonder at the appalling change of outlook that had overtaken him in the night. Yesterday at this hour he had been, comparatively speaking, serene. And what, he asked, had happened — actually happened — in the meantime to throw him into this walking nightmare? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! He had merely opened his eyes and seen things in a new light. Something had taken place in his mind comparable to the breaking of the monsoon. For some time past his mental weather had been dull and lowering, and now had come the thunderclap. In all this, what was truth and what was illusion? Which view of the situation was the right one?

A sudden mistrust of himself and all his most careful reasonings swept over him. Was it possible that he was losing his mental balance? Was he going mad? He began to picture what would happen if he were to attempt to make an explanation of his present fears to his parents. Could he find anything to tell them that would carry conviction? Or would they, with gentle expostulatory voices, and quiet incredulous smiles, apply themselves to soothing him down? The very thought filled him with rage, making him grind his teeth in a frenzy of anger and suffering. Yet perhaps, perhaps,

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they *would* be in the right? Perhaps, perhaps, he *was* nearly mad? Well, be this as it might, he would rather die, he would rather let Gokal die, than open his heart to them at this hour. This was his affair. He had involved himself with Gunevati; he was, in a sense, in league with her. Very good, this terror under which he laboured was the price he had to pay for his truck with her and her friends. Moreover, single-handed, he would outwit and defeat her! If he stood alone, it was because he was disloyal both to evil and to good. It was inevitable that he should stand alone. In grudging his mother and Gokal their unsuspectingness and freedom from care, in pitying himself for the horror of these hours, he was falling to the level of Gunevati — or even lower, for Gunevati was at least happy in her vileness. His path in life was destined to be solitary — had he forgotten it? It was the path of knowledge, of experience; and if it was in the nature of things that knowledge should mean defilement, he must not complain. The world had done nothing but defile him since the hour of his birth; or, to put it more truly, he was condemned by some inexplicable law of his own nature to do himself unceasing outrage.

On these reflections he again fell into an exhausted sleep. Awakening calmer, a new thought dawned upon him. Here, at Khanjo, Gunevati couldn't poison Gokal without drawing suspicion on to herself in a quite marked degree. Nor was there any place in the world less easy to hide in or make an escape from. If she had any ordinary prudence she would hold herself back until Gokal was once more on the road and passing through some town in which one could, without trouble, disappear. Of course the question presented itself why, if running away was so simple, she should go out of her way to poison Gokal at all? She knew that Gokal wasn't the man to have her pursued or nourish thoughts of revenge. Why not make the simplest assumption, which was that she would have the patience to wait until Gokal left Khanjo, and then take the first good opportunity of joining Prince Salim at Allahabad? Why suppose that the idea of poison had ever entered her head?

Exactly! So here he was again at the beginning of all his reasonings. He could have laughed aloud at himself, had he not been so weary and so profoundly penetrated by fear. The questions he had just been asking were the questions of common sense; but — what had common sense to do here? Its only legitimate function was to abdicate, to acknowledge itself out of place. Of this Jali was com-

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pletely convinced. If he mistrusted his intuitions, he mistrusted far more the common-sense arguments by which they could be shown to be silly. Gunevati was a creature of impulse, mixed with cunning. Her calculations, starting from irrational premises, would work to irrational conclusions; to show that it would be both pointless and dangerous to poison Gokal at Khanjo was not to show that Gunevati would not do it.

This line of thought, unconsoling as it was, did, however, lead him to another idea. Why should he not arrange with Mujatta for Gunevati's flight instead of for her death? If it was merely a question of money (and with Mujatta everything came to that) the obstacles could easily be overcome. He had quite a respectable sum of his own, in his chest, and, if necessary, he would find some more somewhere. Why shouldn't he and Mujatta launch Gunevati forth at once upon a journey to Prince Salim at Allahabad? Gunevati had told him repeatedly enough that the Prince was frantic to get hold of her. Why shouldn't he, Jali, pay for a messenger to be despatched in all haste to the Prince, who, one might reasonably suppose, would then see about her abduction himself.

One objection to the scheme did, indeed, cross Jali's mind at this point, but he brushed it aside. If Gunevati were to be believed, Mabun Das had a strong desire to keep her and Prince Salim apart, and he had even given the girl his ironic benediction when she had told him that Gokal was proposing to take her off to the hills. Well! Deep as Jali's respect for Mabun Das was, this, he felt, wasn't the occasion for considering him at all. He was much too desperate, and he believed that Gunevati's impatience would make her equally willing to risk Mabun Das's wrath. Once in Prince Salim's harem she would presumably be safe enough. Here, then, was a way out! Here was a ray of light, here was hope, at last!

Shaking all over with excitement, Jali sprang to his feet and fell to pacing the room. The thing to do was to find Mujatta and win her confidence and complicity; he must get her to reveal to him what was in Gunevati's mind. It was absolutely essential that he should discover from Mujatta whether Gokal was in peril; he could not, he would not, take chances; he could not tolerate a situation in which Gokal's life actually hung upon the spiteful impulses of an utterly conscienceless and unreasoning girl.

Drawing a deep breath he halted before the window, and for a stretch of perhaps five minutes he stared frowningly and unseeingly



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at the bushes outside. This wonderful scheme of his, this heaven-sent solution of his problem — could he accept it? Was it really safe? If he hadn't really cared — that is, if he hadn't cared as desperately as he did — how splendidly it would have satisfied him! For it was a good scheme; there was nothing against it, except that it involved delay, and — Gokal's life was at stake! He couldn't take chances; he couldn't allow himself to be soothed by fair words from a creature such as Mujatta; whatever she were to say, he wouldn't be able to feel absolutely safe. How could she answer for Gunevati from one moment to another? Didn't he know much better than she the nature of Gunevati's feelings towards Gokal? And as for her feelings towards him, Jali — well, they wouldn't be improved by his desperate anxiety to see the last of her; and in providing her with a means of escape, wouldn't he be actually removing what was perhaps deterring her more than anything else from administering poison?

What finally emerged as a result of these anxious deliberations was the resolve to visit Mujatta without delay and to be guided by the outcome of that meeting. Late in the afternoon he slipped out of the house. But after he had gone a little way through the forest he came across the lame boy, who was the constant attendant of Mujatta, and from him he learnt that she had gone away to assist a woman in childbirth in a neighbouring village and would not be at home again until the next day.

That night his sleep was very profound, but he awoke at dawn just as he had intended. Mistrustful of the lame boy's statement, he was determined to make an early visit to the clearing to see for himself whether Mujatta was there. The change from the peace of unconsciousness to the misery of his waking life was almost more than he could bear. Dressing in the chill of a grey dawn, he could not help weakly hoping that the herb-woman would not be there, for he was feeling particularly unequal to his undertaking. Although he had come across Mujatta several times, and although she had always been servile and ingratiating in her odious way, he had never yet spoken more than a dozen words to her. She filled him with unspeakable disgust.

The valley was still full of mist, as he hurried furtively along through the dripping tangles of rhododendrons, and then out among the tall straight columns of the forest trees. Self-coercion, he reflected grimly, could go no further. To be deliberately seeking out this woman, to be entering into confidential relations with her, to

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be forcing himself to tolerate her physical proximity — could anything be more horrible?

On reaching the clearing he paused for a moment to collect his wits and look round. The hovel stood about fifty yards away across a stretch of rough, weedy ground. It stood surrounded by dirt and rubbish, it looked indescribably squalid and desolate; but a thin plume of white smoke was going up from the roof, and Jali felt almost sure that the herb-woman herself must be there. Clenching his teeth, he walked resolutely forward. He went up to the door which was closed; and it was his intention to call out. But he felt his voice to be too unsteady, so he picked up a piece of wood, and knocked with that, for he could not bear to touch the filthy door with his own hand. His knocking produced no immediate response, but he could hear someone moving about inside, and presently an obsequious voice cried out: 'One instant, Great Lord! Great Lord, deign to forgive! Your slave is hastening . . . hastening. . . '

It was *her* voice; and since she said 'Great Lord,' she must, he supposed, have seen him coming, though how, he could not quite make out, for there was no window on this side of the hut.

Then the door opened, and he noticed at once that as her eyes fell upon him her expression underwent a slight change. He noticed this, but his mind at the time did no more. 'Come out!' he said, backing away from the hut. 'Come out! I have something to say to you.'

Mujatta the Cockroach was a woman of sturdy build and slightly inclined to corpulence. She habitually wore a dirty black cotton dress which went down from her neck to her ankles. Her most remarkable physical traits were, first, the shortness of her arms, and secondly, the length of her neck. This immensely long neck of hers was slightly goitered so that her almost chinless face and tiny head seemed to be little more than a prolongation of it. The result was a conformation, the snakishness of which was accentuated by her habit of undulating her neck and protruding her head at you; for she was one of those talkers who like to discharge their volubility at short range.

As Jali now backed, she came forward, and when he backed farther she came forward again. In spite of his previous self-preparation contact with Mujatta's personality was proving too much for him. His thoughts began to flutter wildly about in his head like a flock of frightened birds.

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'I have come to talk to you about Gunevati,' he brought out in a loud, unnatural voice. 'Do you understand? I want you to tell me . . . all about Gunevati . . . about her plans. . . . I am sure you know everything . . . and I have money here. . . .'

Mujatta's habitual expression was one of the most villainous ingratiatingness. Her little beady eyes seemed to be offering an eager yet treacherous welcome to all the turpitudes in the world. In these first moments curiosity — a very natural curiosity, no doubt — was legible upon her features, but after he had spoken it seemed to him that her curiosity became tinged with an impudent amusement. It almost looked as if she found his all-too-visible disgust and loathing of her a matter to smile over. However, after his stammerings had become a little more explicit, her expression underwent, he fancied, another slight change. He got the impression that she had been put on her guard.

These signs were not auspicious. Already he felt a slight disappointment. She was talking hard now, and, whilst hiding her mind behind a screen of empty words, she seemed to him to be reading his thoughts. Faithful to his intentions, he raised his voice again and resolutely shouted her down. He had his little store of prepared sentences; and these he now brought out. They came from his lips very much at random, it was true; but still they ought to have given Mujatta pause. Instead of this, however, whenever he stopped to draw breath, her meaninglessly, irrelevant flatteries poured forth again. A presentiment of failure seized him. As each moment passed it was becoming more unmistakably clear that something in his calculations had gone wrong. The woman actually didn't seem to want to hear what he had to say, and, although it was impossible that she should not be taking in the trend of his speech, those eyes of hers, bright and unblinking as a serpent's, continued to be utterly unresponsive. The light of greed and complicity, which should have been kindled long ago, was not there.

Jali felt that he could do no more. What his actual words had been he hardly knew, nor was he afterwards able to recall more than a phrase here and there; but he had carried out his intentions, he had finished — and he had been defeated! Looking round, he found himself now standing by the edge of the clearing. Nor was it only with the repulsiveness of her physical presence that the woman had been pressing him back; it was rather with the strength of a superior will. For some reason, incomprehensible to him, she was eager

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that he should be gone; so here he now stood routed, with not a word left in his head. The thing that had happened was inexplicable. Mujatta, servile, greedy of gain, had driven him away.

He was staring at her in voiceless bewilderment when a loud whistle sounded from somewhere behind the hut, and at this the woman's head swept round on her long neck with a movement that might well have been accompanied by a hiss. Then the lame boy appeared, jogging towards them with all the speed of which he was capable. As he came he called out and pointed excitedly behind him.

Mujatta turned to Jali again; in a torrent of words she explained that a band of miserable outcasts, the very sight of which would pollute him, were on the point of paying her a visit. Poor wretches! they were suffering from an infectious disease, and she in her charity was going to cure them. Had she but known that the young Maharajah was going to honour her with his presence, she would assuredly have kept them away. But alack! it was now too late; they were already upon her! So the young lord must fly, must fly!

Jali was nothing loath. All his other feelings had given way before an overmastering longing to be gone. Nevertheless, before losing himself in the shade of the trees, he took one swift look behind. That Mujatta had been lying he had not for one moment doubted; and now her mendacity was well proved. His backward glance showed him a well-dressed figure moving with leisurely tread towards the hut. It was certainly not the figure of an outcast.

H EEDLESS of where he was going, he hurried away down the woodland track. The early sunlight was now falling in patches of gold upon the red-brown tree-trunks, and already a scent of warm pine-needles rose from the damp ground. After a little he stopped and looked absently about him, then threw himself down by the side of the path. He had dressed, that morning, in fine clothes, with the half-conscious object of imposing upon Mujatta. Certainly his white turban with its jewelled plumelet had been meant to impress her with the wealth at his command. He now tore it from his head with rage and flung it on the ground.

After sitting there for a while, he clasped his hands over his face and tried to arrange his thoughts. This proved impossible, and yet something exciting was taking place in his brain all the same. Out of the dark turmoil within ideas flashed forth of their own accord. And they were wonderful, dazzling; they made his heart beat fast.

Mujatta had certainly been expecting that important visitor; the reason she had been so unforthcoming was that she had some plan already in hand. She had been suspicious of him because she didn't know how much he knew, or whether he approved. And her plan — what would it have as its object, if not the abduction of Gunevati? Who could that stranger be, if not an emissary of Prince Salim's? Yes! here was the truth of the matter: Mujatta and Gunevati had forestalled him; they had already thought of his plan and set it afoot.

Hadn't it been quite natural, he went on — in fact almost inevitable, that Mujatta should misinterpret his manner of approach? Wouldn't she naturally be thinking that he was in love with Gunevati (which was undoubtedly what Gunevati would have given her to believe), and wouldn't she imagine that he was visiting her with the idea of preventing the girl's flight? This strange, early morning visit of his, and then his begging her to 'betray' Gunevati, and his promise of a bribe, — wouldn't she read her own mistaken meaning into every word?

Jali leapt to his feet, and then threw himself down again. Never in his life before had he pursued his flying thoughts with a more

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frantic excitement than now. How wonderful his thoughts were! They showed him that everything was going well. They promised him an end to his torments. It looked as if Gunevati were actually on the brink of flight; and, if this were so, why should she go to the trouble of poisoning Gokal? Oh, no! she wouldn't poison him now. Not just for the satisfaction of a groundless grudge. She wouldn't complicate her plans and incur the risk of pursuit: it would be ridiculous to suppose that.

Once more Jali's joyful excitement spurred him to his feet, and he fell to walking distractedly up and down. Everything seemed to fit in with his newly-born surmises: Gunevati's intimacy with the herb-woman was adequately accounted for without recourse to the idea of poison. Thank heaven! he hadn't used the word poison in his talk with Mujatta. But — was he quite sure that he hadn't? Terrible doubt! What exactly had he said? He had spoken a good deal about his power to pay her more generously than Gunevati. He had asked her quite definitely to betray Gunevati's secrets. He had made it very clear that he might call upon her to take some action against Gunevati, but — he had never hinted — even remotely — that he . . . No, no, if he had used the word poison, it had been earlier — when he was inviting her to betray Gunevati's confidences. He was almost sure of that. But all the same . . .

So violent was the sudden access of this new anxiety that he felt himself trembling like a leaf. He was in a fever to rush back to Mujatta and do away with all her possible misconceptions. But, God help him! he must first regain some measure of calm. Fool, blunderer, that he had been! Wasn't it more than likely that just now he had done nothing but harm? And if he were to rush back now — very likely breaking into the interview between Mujatta and the stranger — wouldn't he be probably doing yet more mischief? He pressed his burning face with his hands. He *must* see Mujatta again soon — before she got a chance of repeating his words to Gunevati. But not at once — not until he had collected himself, not until he had managed to think, to think.

Putting forth his utmost powers of self-control, he sat down once more by the path. No doubt there were still a hundred contingencies for which he was quite unprepared. For instance, Gunevati might have been already there, in Mujatta's hut, all the time! *That* might have been the reason why Mujatta was so circumspect, and why she kept edging him away; or, again, Gunevati might have

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arrived at the hut since he left it; and what would he do or say, if, upon arriving there, he were to find Mujatta and Gunevati and the stranger, all three together? How would he explain to Gunevati this early morning visit of his?

As he surveyed his former scheme for poisoning the girl a cold sweat of horror broke out over his whole frame. That scheme which had looked so simple and commendable a few hours ago — it now struck him as monstrous and perilous beyond all words. Other people — people who were at home in the world — *they* no doubt could contrive and carry out such things. But oh! not he, not he!

He was sitting on the ground, the palms of his hands pressed hard against his eyes, when these thoughts raced through his mind, and the distress they caused him was such that he uttered a stifled groan. Extraordinary was the shock he received upon hearing that groan, as it were, answered; for there came to his ears a very faint, very brief, little laugh. Raising his head with a quiver of dismay, he saw before him Gunevati, who was standing at a forking of the path, not more than ten yards away. Her pose suggested that she might have been there for a minute already, perhaps more. He stared speechless, and her eyes met his with a gaze that seemed to him dangerously cold. In these moments it was quite beyond him to hide his discomfiture; he couldn't cease from staring, even though he felt that his stare was saying: 'How much can you guess? How much do you know?'

She was standing at a forking of the ways. Had she come from Mujatta's hut or was she going to it? Had he but raised his head a minute earlier, had he but caught a sound of her footsteps on the path, he might have known. But he did not. Gunevati, like him, was dressed in her best clothes. She was wearing cherry-coloured silks, and on her arms and bosom were silver bangles and precious stones. She glowed like an idol against the dark forest shades. Haughty and alien did she seem to him at this moment. Very different from Gunevati, the gazelle, who had come, docile to his beckoning, in the Agra wood. In those fine clothes and with that look in her eyes her proper place was, in truth, the harem of some royal prince — a harem where she could recline all day upon cushions of golden tissue, breathing an air of sandal-wood and musk.

'Gunevati!' he brought out at last, and with smiles and accents horribly forced he exclaimed at the earliness of her rising. 'Where are you going?' he faltered.

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The girl looked at him — not searchingly, but with a contemptuousness that he found even more alarming.

He rose to his feet, and stood waiting. But Gunevati remained silent, and with lowered eyes began plucking the petals from a blue poppy that she had been wearing at her waist. That poppy, thought Jali, must have come from Gokal's garden, and it looked fresh. Assuredly, then, she was on her way to Mujatta; but the next instant he decided no. She would not be pulling her flowers to pieces unless the interview with Salim's messenger were over. It was terrible, not knowing from which direction she had come! Did this chilling manner of hers mean that she had overheard some part of his conversation with Mujatta? He shuddered inwardly. These conjectures were like so many dagger-thrusts, and he was defenceless.

Poison! he thought, poison! Had she overheard that word on his lips? Or had it, perhaps, been repeated to her? And what was he to answer, if she asked *him* what *his* business was at this hour? She had him at every possible disadvantage. He couldn't even decide in what tone, in what manner, he ought to address her. Several days had gone by since they last met, and it seemed to him now that not a shred of their former friendliness remained. But perhaps that was only what *he* felt? No doubt the vehemence of his secret thoughts about her had confused him; there was no reason why her feelings about him should correspond to his about her.

He said: 'I was on my way to see you.' This did not contain a denial of his visit to Mujatta; he might have been intending to come to her after that visit.

'Indeed?' her eyebrows went up. 'You wanted to see me? I wonder what about?'

He wished that she would lift her head, but she was still intent upon the blue poppy in her hand. 'For some time past,' he said, 'I have had the idea that — that you were planning to go away.'

She smiled. 'Why should I want to go away? When did you get that idea?'

He was silent.

'What were you wanting to say to me? Were you going to try to persuade me to stay?'

He remained silent. She looked up, and her dark eyes, although wide open, seemed to him like windows shuttered and barred. 'Anyhow, you are quite wrong,' she continued in the same even



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tone. 'Why should I want to leave my Brahmin? Shouldn't I be a fool to run away from a man like that? A man who dotes on me and gives me all I want? What does it matter if he is old and fat and stupid? I can take other men as lovers when they please me. The Brahmin is too stupid to notice anything.'

'But here you are bored, you are wasted. There is no one here,' stammered Jali.

Gunevati gave a little laugh. 'Is that all you know? Haven't I told you about the young charcoal-burner down the valley, who is as beautiful as Krishna when he appeared among the cow-maidens. Were I to say to him: "Kill the Brahmin!" he would kill him. For the sake of my beautiful charcoal-burner I am content to stay here.'

Her malicious intention was obvious; but that did not necessarily mean that everything she was saying was untrue. Jali looked at her helplessly, and all at once he was seized by an irresistible impulse to make a bid for her candour. 'I will tell you the truth,' he cried out. 'I have just been to see Mujatta.'

'It is pleasant to speak the truth sometimes,' observed Gunevati unmoved.

But Jali was determined not to give up. Wasn't it, after all, certain that she *was* on the eve of flight? That dress of hers, put on for the distinguished stranger, wasn't it almost a proof?

'Why should we lie to one another?' he went on with rising ardour. 'I went to Mujatta to ask her whether it was true that she was helping you to join Prince Salim?'

'Tell me, then,' said Gunevati, with an ambiguous smile, 'why are you so anxious that I should go away?'

Jali had no reply ready. There was something terribly cunning, something terribly obstinate, and also something terribly unintelligent, about Gunevati. That smile of hers was making his heart sick.

'Are you longing for me to leave you alone with your Brahmin?' Gunevati asked smoothly. 'Would you like that? Please tell me.'

She was teasing him. But why? And behind that smile was there not something more than mere idle mischief? Desperately did he regret having flaunted his love of Gokal before her eyes; desperately did he now cast about for some flattery with which to placate her, for some dust to throw in her eyes.

'You see!' said Gunevati, 'you don't know how to answer me!'

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Nor have you explained why you went to Mujatta instead of coming to me. Mujatta is *my* friend — not yours.'

'A pretty friend, by Shiva!' exclaimed Jali in a gust of bitterness.

Gunevati was silent for a moment; and to his astonishment he saw that he had angered her.

'Yes. She is my friend. I was not born a Ranee.'

'I meant she is not worthy to be your friend. You have better friends than that, Gunevati.'

'The fat Brahmin, I suppose?'

▪ 'Yes.'

'And *you*?'

'Yes — me.'

Did he pronounce that last word falteringly? Be that as it might, there was a moment's silence, and then Gunevati gave a little laugh. She laughed! She was looking at him strangely. Again, although he felt as if his eyes must be betraying him, he was unable to detach them from her face. How much did she suspect? Did she suspect and yet laugh? It was terrible. As he looked into her face he thought of it, as it would have appeared cold and fixed in death. And he had schemed how to bring that face and that lovely youthful body down into the grave. It was not remorse that he felt, it was horror. The world was too stark and ruthless a place for him; its passions and issues too harsh; he was not made to endure in himself, nor even to see others endure, the terrific ordeal of life. For a moment he thought of his mother and marvelled at her spirit. Was it blindness, or insensitiveness, or courage, that enabled her to walk smiling through the world? But *she* was not treacherous, she was single-hearted, whereas in his heart and on his lips even now there was treachery and guile.

'Gunevati,' he murmured, 'Why are you like this?' His lips were quivering. 'Can't you see that I should prefer to be your friend!'

She laughed again, and inwardly he shuddered. There was something inexorable about Gunevati; that soft and lovely creature had all the inexorable hardness of the world. But sometimes there was justice in inexorableness. And there was justice in Gunevati now. Only — she was also cruel; and she had the stupid persistency of a child.

'Why do you want me for a friend?' she asked. 'Is it not enough for you to have the Brahmin as your friend?'

He felt that she was worsting him. He had not yet discovered

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whether she was on her way to or from the herb-woman; he had discovered nothing. But she, on the other hand, seemed to be playing with him, and he was becoming quite distraught.

By a great effort he steadied his voice. 'You have often told me that you were longing to escape from Khanjo. I am sure that you have a plan for joining Prince Salim. And Mujatta has helped you to arrange it. Gunevati! Why won't you tell me the truth?'

Gunevati pursed her lips as if tempted to make a cutting reply. But the next moment she flung her scarf over her head; to his dismay he saw that she was making ready to move on.

'Wait! Gunevati, please wait!'

'Wait? What for?'

'I think — I think it is to-night — that you are going away?'

'To-night!' She smiled a little. 'You seem to be in a great hurry to have the Brahmin all to yourself.'

'I . . . ' and he stopped, his voice failing him.

'How should a poor girl like me go and come as she pleases? Have I the money to do everything that I want?' And she shrugged. 'Gunevati!'

But, without paying heed, again she made as if to go upon her way; and her way — Jali's blood ran cold when he saw it — her way was back towards Gokal's house.

'Wait, Gunevati!' he called out in a suffocated voice. 'O God! Why are you leaving me like this? Gunevati! why have you turned into an enemy?'

At last he had forgotten completely his previous designs against her. He was conscious of nothing but his appeal and her hardness. He rushed up and seized her by the arm. 'Look, Gunevati,' he cried. 'Here is money! Take it! Take all you need!' He had drawn out his purse and was thrusting it upon her. 'Take some money for your journey. You will need it, and I have plenty here. Can't you see now that I want only to help you? Why don't you speak? Why don't you say you understand?'

At the clutch of his hand on her arm Gunevati stood still, but in the look she turned upon him there was little comfort to be found. She seemed not surprised, nor vindictive, but simply unmoved. On the other hand the sudden appearance of the purse did, perceptibly, surprise her. She looked into his face, and then back at the purse — the purse that he had produced so unexpectedly. It was now dangling before her — almost like a bribe. The purse seemed to

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awaken a train of thought. But she made no movement to accept it; and after a few instants a change passed over her face, her eyebrows went up a little, and very quietly she drew herself away. Very quietly she moved away from him, but this time it was in the direction of Mujatta's hut.

UNTIL she had completely disappeared, Jali stood where he was, staring. Then he flung the purse on the ground, and, leaning his head against a tree, broke into painful sobs. He was finished. He could do no more. Although he retained the belief that, after all, Gunevati *was* going away, that thought failed to take any hold upon his mind, or to bring him the comfort it should. He was completely subjugated by a sense of weariness, humiliation, and defeat; his spirit lay in the dust.

An hour passed; and then he realized that he must hurry home. During this interval his brain had been empty; now he must apply himself to the business of turning back into the boy he was supposed to be. He must pick up again the threads of his home-life, that remote, trivial, happy existence which was supposed to be his only one. But, as he stumbled blindly along, another spell of sheer bewilderment overtook him. He became suddenly aware of the bird-songs and the sunlight and the sweet-scented air. Here all about him was a world of reality which he was living in and yet ignoring. What a contrast between it and the world of his secret preoccupations! This was the world his mother lived in, and wasn't it more real — this world of sunlight and serenity — than his own world of darkness and fear? With such force did this question grip him that he stopped for a few minutes in a frowning concentration of thought. Wasn't he perhaps becoming mad like those beggars one saw wandering along the road, muttering to themselves, with a far-away look in their eyes? Let him try to stand outside himself and examine his case sanely. It was like this: ever since Gunevati's arrival at Khanjo, he had sunk into greater and greater distress of mind; he had been oppressed by a gathering sense of entanglement and dire responsibility and helplessness, a sense of guilt and hidden danger. And this had gone on until, in the end, he had reached the hell where he now stood. But what had actually happened in the outside world to account for this inward change? Nothing, or practically nothing! And didn't this show that he was losing touch with reality? Didn't it prove that he was in the clutches of a nightmare? And couldn't he wake up from this nightmare and find happiness again?

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These reflections, although they brought him to no conclusion, fortified him a little for the part he had to play, and after reaching home and spending an hour with his mother, he continued to argue with himself in the same vein. What could he point to in the actual visible world to prove that Gokal's life was, or had ever been, in jeopardy? Why! to assume just for the sake of argument that all his conjectures were well-grounded, didn't those very conjectures themselves now lead to the happy conclusion that Gunevati was on the eve of flight? And didn't this save Gokal from any possible danger?

In the afternoon he accompanied his mother to Gokal's house. It was curious that, although Gokal was the centre of his agitations, the man himself had hardly occupied his thoughts. And now, as he walked along by his mother's side, he positively dreaded setting eyes upon him again. Nor was this dread ill-founded. As soon as they were all seated together in the veranda with the sun shining down through the hanging flowers of the convolvulus, and the talk flowing peacefully along — ah then! a dreadful anguish seized him; the tranquil security suggested by the outward aspect of things was altogether too poignant to be borne. But he managed, without betraying himself, to get up and stroll away.

Having turned the corner of the house, he stopped, and it was not long before his self-control came back. He had decided, before setting out, that he would make himself an opportunity to spy upon Gunevati, or even to pay a surreptitious visit to her room. So presently he dived into a tangle of shrubs and crept noiselessly along under them until he got to the back of the outhouse in which Gunevati was lodged. Her window was not so high up but that he could peep in; and at once his eyes fell upon the girl herself, who was bending intently over some small bits of paper which he recognized as the charms that he had written out for her in days that now seemed very far away. She was so engrossed in what she was doing that he was able to straighten himself up sufficiently to look farther into the room; and what he saw there made his heart leap for joy. On the ground beside the door two or three bundles were lying, and the room itself had been cleared of its customary litter. Without a doubt Gunevati was preparing for flight.

Breathless, his heart pounding against his ribs, he moved cautiously away, and a few minutes later he was once more on the veranda. Here, sitting upon the step at his mother's feet, he listened

dreamily to the conversation going on above his head; he listened also to the humming of the bees and the sighing of the wind in the pines; and an ecstatic relief, a thankfulness deeper than any he had yet known, swept over his spirit. At last he felt convinced that all was well; he need not rack his brains any more, he could put away his anxiety. In a few hours Gunevati would be gone, and here was Gokal, serene and in good health! The dreadful nightmare had ended.

It was too much! Again he felt a hysterical emotion overwhelming him; he had to get up and go away. This time he ran wildly down the slope towards his own house, but before getting there he plunged into a thicket, sank down upon the ground, and let himself weep his fill.

An hour passed, an hour of exquisite relaxation; yet, empty as his mind was, towards the end of this time he became aware that there was a tiny flaw in his serenity. There was something that pressed upon his attention. It was like a small thorn, which, when his mind made certain movements, gave it a just perceptible prick.

He got up and walked home with a sober gait. Going straight to his room, he stood staring out of the window; suddenly he noticed that the brief minutes of his happiness had already come to an end. Secretly, as it were, and without his authorization, his brain had sprung into activity again; it was now working uneasily round and about the figure of Gunevati. Presently, as he walked up and down the room, he was lost in an obscure but powerful anxiety. And suddenly a vision sprang up before his eyes — a vision of Gunevati and the parting look she had swept over him, as he had stood there, poor wretch! offering his purse. She had looked at him strangely. Then she had gone back to Mujatta. He walked up and down. Beneath his knitted brows his eyes were fixed and staring. Gunevati had looked at the purse strangely, and — instead of going home — she had gone back to Mujatta. God! why wouldn't his brain leave him in peace! Why must it for ever torment him? He saw the truth plainly now! He saw it with deadly lucidity. Everything that he had done was a mistake. And his last and most fatal mistake had been the offering of that purse. Gunevati had guessed that the money had been intended for Mujatta; she had gone back to Mujatta to question her about it; and the two between them — heaven help him! — what conclusions would they not have reached?

Before this last mistake of his Gunevati might have been content

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to fly without taking her revenge; but, after this, flight alone would assuredly not satisfy her. How persistently she had harked back to his love of Gokal! Didn't she feel by instinct that this love was a measure of his detestation of *her*? Would she permit his hatred of her, his treachery towards her, to pass without punishment? Would she be content to take herself off, leaving him to unspoilt happiness with Gokal?

Jali staggered to his bed and let himself sink down. Perhaps he was exaggerating; perhaps his judgment was upset. Gunevati was rancorous, but she was also indolent. Not even in rancour was she likely to be consistent. Just now, as he had watched her through the window, she had been poring over those ridiculous charms of hers as if nothing else in the world were of consequence; she was probably trying to make some augury for the success of her journey. Wasn't it quite possible that after parting from him in the morning she had hardly troubled to give him a second thought?

And yet again, how could he tell? How could he hope to read the mind of so alien a creature? Oh, the mystery of human minds! Those secret engines at work on every side of one! Those secret centres of energy, manufacturing love and hate. Could one see into the depths of *any* human mind? No, even the simplest and friendliest had its core of coldness, darkness, and indifference, if not actual hostility. As for him, Jali, he was no better than anyone else.

What had Gunevati been thinking about as she sat in her room, packing up her scents and cosmetics, intent over her foolish charms, busy with a hundred small details of her private life? Was there any means of reckoning the likelihood of her possessing a little box of powder, a little phial, that had been slipped into her hand one day — perhaps weeks ago — by the vile Mujatta? Was she considering that little box now, as it lay half-hidden in her palm? Was she fingering it, and saying to herself: 'Shall I? Wouldn't it just serve them both right?'

The day wore on; and Jali continued, of necessity, to play his double part. In his mother's presence his manner was as usual, but no matter whether he was with her or by himself, his secret torment went on. As evening approached, there loomed up before him the menace of a critical hour, the hour of Gokal's evening meal, the hour of Gunevati's last opportunity. What could he do? Surely this last risk could be obviated?

As the light in the west began to turn golden, he slipped once more



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out of the house. Quietly and quickly his feet pattered along the path which was already growing dark under the ceiling of the trees. To think that it was only twelve hours ago that he had made his first expedition to Mujatta's hut! Twelve hours! And it might have been twelve years. Time had become without meaning to him. He was living in a present that was made timeless by its unbearable intensity. Halting for a moment, he laid his hand upon a tree-trunk and turned his face to heaven. 'O Brahm!' he supplicated. 'Let there be a long peace before my next rebirth.'

At last he arrived at the clearing. A cloudless evening sky looked down into it, and the trees all around were motionless walls of darkness. Mujatta's hut through the gloaming looked small, solitary, and mysterious. The ground in between, with its littering refuse, made him think of a deserted battle-field. White wisps of smoke drifted up from a hole in the roof.

Presently a figure, which he made sure was Mujatta's, appeared in the open doorway. For a moment longer he remained motionless under the trees. That solitary figure fascinated him. What were the thoughts that moved inside that skull? What was the meaning of that life — to itself? or to the world of which it formed a part? He drew a deep breath and stepped forward towards the hut; this time he was not going to fail; Mujatta should be made to feel that he was desperate; by threats, cajoleries, or bribes, he would arrive at the truth of what she knew.

As soon as he moved the woman caught sight of him: he could tell that from the sharp turn of her head. And having seen him, she stood still, waiting. He forced himself to come up close enough to look well into her face, which wore its habitual smile — a smile that expressed nothing except a vacuous, crafty eagerness.

'You see, I have come again,' he articulated; and she nodded and clucked in answer. This second visit of his did not seem to surprise her, and she lost no time in launching forth upon a stream of meaningless flatteries.

He was ready to cut her short. Imitating the voice and manner of the usher at his father's court, he shouted into her face.

'Be silent, woman!'

Mujatta stopped; if not intimidated, she was at any rate somewhat taken aback.

Then Jali began. 'I know everything!' he said. 'I have been talking with Gunevati, and she has told me everything.'

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Mujatta was silent. For a few moments the two peered at one another through the dusk.

'Listen!' continued Jali, and he went on. There was no reason why she should hide anything from him any longer. He had seen Gunevati, he had watched her making her preparations; he was favourable to her flight. His reason for coming here now was that he feared lest she might be meditating some mischief before she went.

Having brought this out, he paused; and once again Mujatta let flow her senseless verbiage. And once again he shouted her down. Let her not dare to hide anything! Let her speak out, and speak the whole truth! Candour would be well rewarded, but should she hold anything back . . .

He stopped, suffocating, and now as he peered yet closer into the woman's face he suspected that he was failing again.

'Aie, aie, aie!' she cried with a great deal of ducking and mouthing. What was the little lord saying? What was this thing the young Maharajah wanted of her? Aie, aie! his words came so fast and furious that she was completely overwhelmed. What had she, poor old Mujatta — the Cockroach as they all called her — what had she to do with Gunevati? Gunevati was under the protection of the holy Brahmin. She was a grand lady now. She could not be expected to give her confidence to poor old Mujatta.

Shaking with rage, Jali interrupted, he had seen her visitor of the morning, and he knew well enough what the visitor's business was. By Shiva, unless she wished to die the death of a dog . . .

'Aie, aie, aie!' The shrill, hypocritical plaint rose above his voice, which, for all his blustering, was husky and weak. Aie, aie! the Lord Krishna have mercy upon her! Was the Maharajah angered with his slave?

Jali was almost speechless. What was the barrier between her intelligence and his? There seemed to be something hidden in her mind that took the meaning out of everything he could possibly say; she seemed to be cunning and stupid in a manner that he could not hope to comprehend.

'Listen, woman!' he cried. 'I have told you that I have money with me, and I mean it. Look at this purse! The money is yours, if . . .' and he thrust the purse into her face.

Mujatta's expression changed; for the first time she looked greedy, and a new ray of hope sprang up in his heart.

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'Money,' he repeated. 'Gold!'

'Aie, aie, little lord!' A greasy palm shot out. Let the bountiful Maharajah but give her a coin or two in token of good faith and she would lay her heart, her whole heart, bare before him.

'Have you ever sold poison to Gunevati?'

'Poison! By Shiva, never!'

'Listen! From here I am going to the holy Brahmin's house, and unless you succeed in convincing me . . .'

'Gracious lord! Gracious lord, I swear . . . !'

'Has Gunevati ever spoken to you of poison?'

'Never, beneficent lord! Never, never!' And, hastily stowing away the coins that he had shaken out, she extended her palm for more. 'Just one more,' she whined, 'just one.'

'Speak, devil!' gasped Jali.

She pushed her face into his and began to whisper. Just a few more coins and she would tell him all. For she knew everything, everything. Everyone confided in her. Gunevati had no secrets from her — oh, no! Why then, the very first week after her arrival, Gunevati had come into her hut and said . . .

Jali's hands were trembling; his whole body was trembling; clumsily he shook out more coins; he had nearly come to the bottom of his purse.

There was a pause; Mujatta was stowing away her money; it was obvious that her whole interest lay there. And then her hand went out yet once again.

The pause lengthened: both were silent; at last a sudden perception of the futility of his proceedings struck Jali like a blow in the face.

'Unless you speak,' he said on a low voice, 'I will kill you. Do you understand?'

The woman's countenance was beaming with triumphant satisfaction. 'Aie, aie,' the whine of thinly disguised falsity broke out afresh. Verily, the young Maharajah was to her as a god! Unworthy slave, what would she not do to show her gratitude! But when he asked her to tell him about Gunevati, what was she to say? Gunevati had come to her, in the first instance, to be cured of a wart on her foot. The holy Brahmin had said to her: "Go to the old woman and be cured of your wart." And so . . .

'The poison! You sold her poison!' whispered Jali dementedly. The woman threw up her hands. 'Young Maharajah! How

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should I come to possess poison?' and she glanced furtively over her shoulder towards the door of her hut.

Jali was beyond speech.

'Beneficent lord! Beneficent lord!' And still bowing and nodding and muttering in her usual style, Mujatta backed with uncanny speed towards the black doorway behind her.

A scream burst from Jali's throat. 'Foul hag!' he cried. 'Stop! I command you: stop!'

But she did not stop. With a frightened, yet triumphantly evil, glance over her shoulder she turned for a final scurry into her lair.

Another howl of rage and execration broke from Jali's throat, and, snatching up a stake from the ground, he rushed and struck at the woman's head with all the strength of his arm. The wood was half rotten and broke at the blow, but Mujatta fell in a heap. For a minute, while she lay there faintly moaning, he looked down at her, and even raised his arm to strike again. Then he threw the stick from him and moved a few steps away.

The woman was silent now. All was silent in the clearing, and over the whole forest. He looked around him. The sky overhead was dark blue and powdered with stars; the tall, straight trees stood without movement; a thin stream of white smoke still went up from the roof of the hut.

All at once he gathered himself together and began to run. He ran swiftly through the gloom of the forest in the direction of Gokal's house. All thought of Mujatta passed out of his mind. The hour of Gokal's evening meal was not far off — and he must be there.

The interval between his leaving the clearing and his arrival at the back of Gokal's yard seemed hardly to form a part of his waking life. He was vaguely conscious of bruising himself against an occasional tree-trunk, and once, on catching his foot in a root, he fell sprawling to the ground. When he reached the door of the yard his breath was coming in gasps and the sweat was pouring down his face. He looked cautiously in. Firelight shone upon the seamed countenance of the old cook who was squatting before his pans. Somebody was moving in the darkness at the back of the yard. Smoke from another fire, burning somewhere outside, showed that Gokal's servants were also preparing their meal. There was no sign of Gunevati; and the door of her house was shut.

Jali waited for a little in order to wipe his face and recover breath. His violent run through the wood had done him good; and the

everyday tranquillity of the scene now before his eyes had the effect of further steadying him. He continued to stand there and watch. How conscientiously the old cook applied himself to the task. 'What can I say to him?' he asked himself. 'He will think me completely mad.' A yellow firelight mingling with the afterglow of sunset and with the brightness of a rising moon, the smell of wood-smoke, murmuring voices out of the dusk, — these were things that he remembered from his earliest childhood; they were familiar and friendly and safe.

Slowly he moved across to the fire, taking care not to startle the old man, nor to step within the area of purified ground. The face lifted up to him was grave; and brief, though courteous, was the return made to his salutations. He stood by and waited; provided that you did not distract him, the cook would be willing to talk. And, sure enough, presently the old man launched forth upon one of his sententious discourses. The burden of it was that the valley of Khanjo and its inhabitants were accursed; thieves these people were and liars, and bearers of parasites — not innocent, like those at home, but poisoners, firing your blood with disease. Blessed would the day be when his master saw the wisdom of quitting this vile country of darkness, rains, plagues, and necromancers of the baser sort.

All this Jali had heard more than once before; and with all of it he heartily agreed. Now, however, he had his own word to put in; and as soon as a pause came he formally cleared his throat. 'What you say, O Madhuradan, is true. But listen! for I have something to add thereto.'

The cook lifted up his patient, wrinkled face; whereupon, looking deep into his eyes, Jali said:

'Although this valley does indeed contain enough evil in itself, your master — may he rest in Brahm! — imported evil into it.'

So unexpected was this speech that several seconds went by before the cook made answer.

'Blessed is the moment when the eye of wisdom is opened,' he murmured; and then, bowing his head, he went on: 'The son of Rajah Amar has spoken out of the ancestral heart.'

Jali was profoundly stirred. For a minute more he remained there in silence, then slipped away into the shadows and left the yard. The old man was, assuredly, shrewder than he believed him to be. Slow-minded he had always seemed, and garrulous and overflowing with facile emotion; but there was more in him than had appeared.

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It was with a new sense of reassurance, a newly-found calm, that Jali made his way back to his own house. But in point of fact his exhaustion was so great that he would hardly have been capable of any further emotion in any circumstances whatsoever. A little later, as he went to bed, he told himself that all was well; but he knew that he would have had to tell himself this in any case; for, in truth, he could do no more — he was at the end of his strength.

WHEN he woke from his sleep, his waking was sudden and complete; his mind was perfectly clear, or so it seemed to him; and if he felt a certain bewilderment — that was simply because he could not make out what time of day it was. A few seconds later, however, he realized that the light in his room was not daylight at all, but very bright moonlight; and the next moment he heard the voices of men talking excitedly and understood that it was they who had woken him. In a single overwhelming rush his memories returned; and almost in the same instant he guessed what the situation was — Gokal had been poisoned after all: Gokal was dying or dead.

He lay quite still in his bed and listened. That voice with a sob in it was the voice of Gokal's cook. Weak and garrulous the old man now sounded, and his mother was sternly questioning and chiding him. Other agitated explanatory voices broke in; a group of Gokal's servants were talking to his mother through the window of her room. And the servants in the house were hurrying about in a turmoil. He heard someone being sent off to fetch the herb-woman, whose skill in medicine was accounted great. 'I wonder if I killed her,' thought Jali. The fact that she was being sent for showed that Gokal was not yet actually dead.

He lay in bed, very calm, resolved to pretend that he was still asleep. His agonies were over; he noted it himself without surprise. At the back of his mind the same thought was repeating itself over and over again: 'This is the end. I shall try to find Gunevati, and kill her. But in any case, this is the end.'

For the time being all he had to do was to lie still and keep his eyes closed. He felt sure that his mother was making ready to go over to Gokal's house; and he had hopes that after looking in at him she would give the servants orders that he was not to be disturbed. Everything happened as he expected. Before very long his mother and the others moved off, and the house became quiet again. For a little longer he lay still, listening to the subdued but excited voices of the group, who were moving down the path that went across the valley. Then he got up and dressed himself. Taking his dagger to the window, he examined it carefully in the moonlight, and felt its edge. There was very little hope of finding Gunevati, he supposed;

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most likely she was already well on her way out of the valley; but all the same he was not going to let any chance slip by.

In these intentions there was certainly an element of make-belief; if his thoughts were concentrated on Gunevati to the exclusion of Gokal, it was because he was seeking to make revenge serve as a refuge from grief; in revenge, real or factitious, he could forget himself. Vengeance, then, was his inspiration and support, as presently he crept out of the house, dagger in hand, upon a quest that he liked to regard as murderous. Noiselessly he sped along the path that his mother and the others had taken a few minutes ago. The full, bright moon cast an air of unreality over everything. It made a new kind of day, an unearthly day, a day in which unearthly things could happen. This was the kind of day in which he would henceforth live; for him there should be no more accounting to humdrum reality. He was a new, mad Jali; he was raised above fatigue and fear, above all the everyday feelings of ordinary man. Turning his face up to the moon's enormous disc, he dazzled himself with its light, and drank deeper and deeper of the reckless indifference it instilled into him.

Before very long the lights of his mother's party appeared on the pathway in front. His pace had been much faster than theirs, and it would have been easy to join them. But instead of this he hung a few yards behind, dodging in and out of the shadows. It pleased him to follow thus, unseen, like a stalking beast, and he imagined himself springing out upon the hindmost man, stabbing him in the back, and vanishing into the bushes.

A little later, when the house came in sight, he left the path in order to work his way through the tangle of rhododendrons up to the back of Gunevati's hut. Again he looked in through the window, and this time, seeing that the room was empty, he swung himself in over the sill. The moon, full and round and red, was pouring its light into the room. He stood by the window, staring about him, his shadow lying in a black streak across the floor. Gunevati had gone; her bundles had gone; there was nothing left of her but a faint perfume in the air.

After a minute he went to the door, opened it a crack, and peeped into the yard. A group of Gokal's servants were gathered together outside the house, talking in tense undertones. He strained his ears to catch what they were saying; and presently one man raised his voice in his excitement, as he described how he had seen Gunevati



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walking away into the forest soon after nightfall. Well! said another contemptuously, there was nothing very unusual in that; and these words raised a brief, significant laugh.

Jali closed the door again, and suddenly a flood of anger swept over him. What fools people were! All this talk and excitement after the event! People never foresaw anything, were never on their guard against anything, and then they would lift hands and voices in idiotic consternation when disaster befell. It was because they did not really mind about anything. It seemed to him that he was the only person in the world who really minded things. Trembling with rage and despair, he swore to himself that he would mind no more. He would outdo the others in their shallowness, their irresponsibility, their gross indifference.

As he looked round the room, the idea came to him to make a search. Pulling open chests and cupboards, he examined everything that Gunevati had left behind and flung all her belongings in confusion on to the floor. What his object was he could hardly have explained; but a malevolent curiosity animated him; and perhaps he cherished the hope that he might come across something that would help him to bring retribution upon her. Forgetting that the girl could neither read nor write, he searched particularly for letters or scraps of paper. When, however, he came upon the charms that he himself had copied out, he threw them away without a thought.

Having finished, he made a pause. He stood still in the middle of the disordered room and stared about him with a face of despair. What next? What could he do next to save himself from thought? The moon shone full into his face, and he stared at it wildly; again he tried to hypnotize himself with its brilliance; why couldn't he lose himself in the reality with which that flood of blue light was inundating the earth. 'I must become mad or unconscious,' he said to himself. 'I must sleep. Why not sleep, and sleep, and sleep?'

With a sudden bound he ran forward, sprang through the window, and went tearing and fighting his way through the bushes down the slope. In a few minutes he was home again; and at once he threw off his clothes and flung himself upon the bed. 'I will be ill,' he thought. 'I will have fever, delirium. I will lose myself somehow.' Yes, he would rave, he would go mad; if necessary, he would die.

Towards morning, when his mother looked into the room, she found him tossing and moaning. To his secret astonishment and satisfaction, he was in truth feeling decidedly ill. He complained of

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high fever, and was given a cooling draught. A little later he fell into a doze, and when he woke he was sick. He told his mother that without a doubt he had been poisoned like Gokal. This fiction gave him great comfort; not long after, he sank into a profound sleep.

For the next few days he protested that he was ill and refused to rise from his bed. His mother informed him that Gokal had been made very ill by a dish of mushrooms, and had nearly died; but now he was making a good recovery. Jali received this news dreamily; and although he listened to her daily reports with deep attention, there was nothing to show that Gokal was much in his thoughts.

The truth was this: he had managed to transport himself in imagination far away from the hated valley of Khanjo. In dreams at night and in reveries by day he lived through scenes chosen from his earlier years; and, curiously enough, the memories that most pleasantly and incessantly haunted him were those of his journey with his father to the wet jungle-lands of the South. The dreams that took him back to those days were strangely ecstatic, they spread a haze of rapture over the daytime hours. One, in particular, recurring night after night in various patterns, had such an entrancing sweetness that he would lie still all through the day after it came pursuing — as though it were some floating scent or sound — the elusive delight with which it tantalized him.

This dream always opened with the same scene. It appeared to him that he had been travelling for many hours along a moist, green tunnel through the jungle, and was emerging at last into a small open space that was bathed in a pink flush of evening light. In front of him there rose a grey hillock of stone, a smooth gently-curving mound of bare rock; and as he stood before it he could feel upon his face its heat, and upon his eyeballs its glare. The low sunlight, sweeping over the breathless jungle-top, struck full upon that ancient, naked slope, making it shine and roast; and nothing grew upon it but grey, leafless, twisted, yet virginal, temple-trees, their roots clutching the barren rock, their arms lifting snow-white blossoms into the air. Those trees were impassioned priestesses, — priestesses crowning with a strange beauty and perfuming with the scent of paradise, this jungle-island that was either sacred or accursed.

A door, a little door, painted a dull red, stood before him in the slope of stone, and on one side of it was another smaller door leading into the chamber where the sacred cobras had once been housed. Gunevati was with him; it was she who told him this.

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And now the dull red door was opened, and candles were lighted; and their flames, which were pale green in the sunlight, turned yellow as they were taken into the dark. Before going in he turned his eyes once more upon the crystalline blossoms of the temple-trees; and that crystalline whiteness, sun-gilt against the blue, brought Mary, Mother of God, into his mind. Yet the blue of the sky — hot, hot, beyond the thin, grey branches — was not the cool blue of Mary's robes; nor was the sun's gilt a pious gilt; nor were the white flowers faint-scented lilies, but blossoms so drugged by their own sweetness that they would drop, whilst yet unfaded, to the ground.

The dark closed about him like water, making him throw back his head and hold out his hands. At first he breathed and stepped gingerly, but the air, although heavy and sweet like a syrup, was without the smallest taint of staleness, and the floor was clean and smooth to his bare feet. Presently the guiding priests halted and when they held up their candles, he found himself in a broad chamber in the heart of the rock. Of the sun he could now see nothing more than a small rusty patch of light upon the stone of the distant doorway. But, although the sunlight was far away, this chamber was very hot. For, whether blazing in mid-heaven or sunk under the sea, the sun was here — here in this belly of rock, here in this womb of earth; here the sun reigned supreme — reigned in a darkness that was unutterably charged with its dæmonic energies.

By the glimmer of the candles Jali gazed upwards into the faces of the carved gods; and they, vacantly ferocious, glared and gnashed their teeth at the emptiness before them. Thus, century after century, in the stifling dark they had gnashed their teeth and glared. And Jali considered them thoughtfully, without derision and without fear; these symbols of godhead impressed him as both suitable and august.

Then his dream would change, and it would seem to him that he was stepping out into the cool night air. The priest who accompanied him was Gokal — but an older, fatter Gokal, a sardonic Gokal; this man it was who always locked up the small red door; then bowed low and disappeared. After this, exhausted and yet happy, he would drag himself up the flight of shallow steps cut in the grey rock-ground. Motionless and fragrant round him stood the temple-trees, their thin arms uplifted, offering white blossoms to the moonlight. In the east the sky was now green, with a copper-

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coloured moon hanging behind the motionless fronds of a tall, distant palm. Low clouds rested upon the western horizon like huge crocodiles sleeping in a pool of blood. The moon, as she rose, played strangely with the wisps of jungle-vapour that were sailing over the green-black trees. Fruit-bats were dancing silently and madly in the middle air.

The daylong reveries induced by this dream had the allurements of sensuality and poetry combined; they tantalized Jali with a rapture that was both intimate and remote. The moments that he dwelt upon with special ecstasy were, first, that of his emergence from the jungle when the mysterious mound broke upon his sight; and then, the timeless period of his final contemplation, when, standing on the summit of the mound, he looked over the jungle darkening in the night.

During these days his attitude towards his mother was one of obstinate aloofness. He told her that he would never get well at Khanjo, and that it was necessary that the whole party should leave without delay. She answered that as soon as Gokal was well enough to travel, they would all set out together to join his father at Ravi; and she begged him to take his food properly and get up from his bed. But he refused; the most she could prevail on him to do was to recline in a hammock in front of the house.

This went on until the actual day of departure arrived. When that joyful morning came he was up at dawn and as active as any one could be. The start was made early, with the sunlight slanting through the dew-drenched rhododendrons and the birds still loudly singing. Jali was the first in the saddle, and there he sat, before the house, beside himself with eagerness to be off. Meanwhile the people of the village were gathering to see the cavalcade set out, and their presence added more than a touch of anxiety to his impatience. In particular he hated the sight of the herb-woman, who, ever since the night of Gokal's seizure, had been enjoying the glory of having saved the holy Brahmin's life. That vile creature was much in evidence now, for she actually had the impudence to stand forward from amongst the shivering, sullen-looking crowd and make great demonstrations of devotion and respect. Jali watched her with fear and rage.

At last Gokal's train arrived and the combined party was ready. Gokal had slept well and was in good spirits, he seemed to share the

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general view that this change was going to restore him to complete health. It was a supreme moment for Jali when the word was given to start. Riding on, he threw back his head, closed his eyes, and offered a prayer of ecstatic thankfulness to all known and unknown gods. Never had sunlight and bird-song seemed so exquisite to him as now; never before had life offered him such a moment of heartfelt rejoicing.

At the first turn of the road, when the detested spot was about to pass out of sight, he drew up in order to let the train go by. Although he scorned to breathe a parting malediction upon the evil little valley where he and his had suffered such ill, he vowed to himself that he would erase the memory of it from his mind for ever.

All day they rode along through the tall, dark trees, and after a while Jali realized that not until open ground was reached would he feel really safe. He looked at the straight trunks rising on either side and frowned at them in contemptuous distaste. Their ridiculous weight of sagging boughs was like the bedraggled plumage of a half-drowned fowl. And the little ice-cold brooks that ran across the path, the little mountain meadows with their starry flowers — they were one and all made in the same pattern of petty prettiness. Give him the dirt and broken potsherds outside a desert town! Yes, by Shiva, dung and potsherds on the desert, with the wind and sunlight streaming over them, they were pleasanter to him by far than the sweetest Alpine field!

The caravan moved slowly, its pace being set by Gokal's heavy palanquin, and it was accordingly not until the morning of the third day that open country was reached. When this happened Jali's sense of escape was complete, and every circumstance ministered to his delight. The weather was bright and warm, the party were all in good spirits, and Gokal, instead of being exhausted by the journey, was showing distinct signs of added strength. When at last the whole of the procession had come out on to the great rolling expanse of sunny turf, Jali sprang from his horse and began to dance madly about, shouting and behaving in a fashion so foreign to him that his mother came near to alarm. Then next, remounting in a flash, he galloped on ahead, guided his horse up to the summit of a knoll, and there stood gazing over the plains in a transport of joy. In his imagination he saw himself sliding like an eagle through the air; he was sliding down over the intervening hills to alight in the glorious heat and dust of the brown Indian plain.

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From now on, after so many nerve-racking weeks, he dared to cast aside all care. Once every morning and afternoon he would ride ahead of the others, and so find time to pick berries and flowers, or stand and gaze his fill over the hills that sloped downward into the west. And always he would take with him the basket that contained his family of cat-bears and give them an airing on the grass. The past, he felt, was done with; in a few days Gokal would be well again, and then nothing would remain to remind him of evil times gone by. Everything in fact would be better than ever before — better because trials and dangers survived had changed the old Jali into another man.

It was in the first hours of a mild and sunny afternoon that the travellers reached the brow of the hill above Ravi, and here they found Amar waiting to welcome them, for he had been informed by a runner of their approach. Gokal's palanquin was put down, and as there was plenty of time to cover the last few miles of the journey, they called for an hour's halt. But the talk and the tea-drinking in prospect offered Jali no particular attractions, so presently he announced his intention of riding on by himself. As his horse picked its way carefully down the mountain path he sang out loud in his content. The warmth of the sun upon the slope brought out the scent of the thyme; bushy-tailed rock-rats were scuttling in and out of their holes; the lake glittering beneath him promised pleasures that he had always longed for, and never yet been able to enjoy.

Upon reaching the floor of the valley he found himself in a loose thicket of brier and blackthorn, the bushes of which were intertwined with raspberry canes covered with ripe fruit. About two hundred yards away the lake shone behind a fringe of alders and willows. Jali tied his horse up to a tree, and, before going down to the water, fell to eating the berries which had an unfamiliar but delicious taste.

It was while he was thus engaged that he received a shock of surprise, for all at once he heard his name called out from quite near. Starting round in bewilderment he beheld his cousin Ali, Hari's eldest son, stretched out at his ease under the shade of a tufted alder. How Ali came to be in this place he could not imagine. The last time he had seen him was at Fatehpur-Sikri, when Ali had been in attendance upon Makh Khan. Jali had not taken to him much at that time, for his cousin, who was seventeen, and older by nearly four years, had treated him with more patronage than he liked. But in the unexpectedness of this encounter his former impressions passed out of his mind, and he returned Ali's hail with a shout of astonished pleasure. The latter, without changing his position, smiled quietly as he ran up, his composure implying that he could hardly be expected to exhibit an equal excitement. No, Ali was not a young man that life could easily take aback. Not that he had the air of being conceited, nor even of possessing more self-assurance than one should at seventeen; but he did somehow convey the impression that he knew where he stood in the world; and there he took his place, ready to look anybody straight in the eyes, modest, amicable, but possibly just a trifle smug.

For a while the two boys exchanged questions, Jali chatting quite eagerly; but of a sudden his eye caught the gleam of something white behind the screen of willows, and incontinently he broke off.

'Is that a sailing boat?' he asked.

'Yes. My boat.'

Jali's eyes widened. He had a passion for sailing that he had never been able to indulge. There was something in the lean of a tall mast, and the bellying of a full sail, that gave him a thrill akin to his thrill from the desert.

'Perhaps you would like to have a look at the boat?' continued Ali, and with these words he rose and lazily brushed the leaves from his well-cut tunic. His face, his manners, his general deportment, were all beautifully of a piece.

Together they went down to the small creek, and there Jali beheld by far the most elegant little boat that he had ever seen. While he was staring, silent with admiration and envy, Ali examined the sky.

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'Not a breath!' he grumbled; 'nor any chance of getting one. I shall have to row myself back.'

Jali sighed profoundly. He had just been hearing that his cousin was now in Prince Daniyal's suite, having joined the Prince in his lake-encampment about three weeks ago. Compared with himself, Ali was an accomplished worldling; and here, staring him in the face, was one of the magnificent prizes the worldly life had to offer. The Prince had given Ali this boat for his very own; with several others it had been brought to the place overland, at immense cost, strapped to the back of an elephant. 'I,' thought Jali, 'I shall have to rest content with one of the clumsy local craft.'

Naturally, the talk went back to Prince Daniyal, and although Ali was not at all the man to boast, he did allow a few illuminating rays to fall upon his present course of life. Existence in Daniyal's circle was made to scintillate magically before Jali's eyes, and the sight of that boat converted him into a very respectful listener. However, even without the boat he would have been curious to hear anything that Ali could tell him about Daniyal. Half the ladies in the Agra Palace had been infatuated with the Prince despite the fact that not one in ten could boast of even a slight acquaintance. Lady Jagashri had been among the most ardent and at the same time one of the most favoured, for the Prince on several occasions had thrown a smiling word in her direction. Jali remembered that even his aunt Srilata had confessed herself to be interested and amused by Daniyal; and for his aunt Jali cherished a deep, if somewhat puzzled, respect. Thus, although not attaching too much importance to what these ladies thought, Jali had become impressed with the fact that the Prince enjoyed a certain prestige over and above that conferred upon him by his rank; the Prince stood out in his mind as an intriguing personage; and now he thought it quite interesting, as well as not a little strange, to find Ali serving as a link. For the Prince was eminently artistic and intellectual, a patron of the Arts, whilst Ali had never seemed to have the smallest leaning in that direction. The Ali he knew was a promising polo-player, an enthusiastic sportsman, a youth whose good looks, good manners, and out-of-door aptitudes, commended him quite adequately without his needing to trouble about the things of the mind. It was very difficult to picture him as a member of the sophisticated company surrounding the brilliant young prince.

Before he had finished admiring the boat, however, his cousin



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laid a hand upon his arm. 'We haven't much time left,' he said, and his eye travelled to the mountain-slope down which the rest of Jali's party could be seen making their leisurely way. 'And there are one or two things I ought perhaps to explain.' On the 'perhaps' he paused; he was giving his young friend a look as who should say: 'To a man of the world not many more words would be necessary. Surely you can guess . . . ?'

But Jali could not guess; and, as he continued to show a blank face, Ali pursed his lips and went on. Had it not struck Jali as odd that he should have joined the Prince's retinue just at the time when the relations between the Prince and his father were rather strained, his father being actually under arrest, by the Prince's orders, at Agra?

Jali blushed and felt small. The thought *had* come into his head, but the sight of that marvellous boat had driven it out again. Besides, he always found it so hard to bear in mind that Hari Khan and Ali were father and son; they were so ridiculously unlike one another.

For a few moments his companion continued to fix him with a steady regard. That level look of Ali's was a noteworthy characteristic of him. It was not impolite, it was not appraising, it was certainly far from penetrating. It seemed merely to say: 'See how steadily I can look you in the face.' But there was, as Jali now understood, a particular point in that look at this moment, for Ali's position certainly was rather questionable.

Then the young man went on to explain. The betrothal of Makh Khan's daughter, Lalita, to Prince Daniyal had naturally brought the Khan and the Prince together, and equally naturally he, Ali, who was then in attendance on Makh Khan, had come under Daniyal's notice. His mother, too, was already a friend of the Prince's, and when the latter proposed that he should be transferred to his suite, she had had no reason for withholding her consent. For the quarrel, Jali must understand, between his father and the Prince, had not yet taken place — or at any rate she had not yet heard about it. And as for cancelling the appointment afterwards — well, the Prince might very well have been the one to do that; but he had not done so. On the contrary he had been charming. And although he had felt obliged, as a matter of form, to keep Hari Khan under arrest for a little while longer, he certainly bore him no malice.

Here Ali paused; and, when he went on, his tone was more con-

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fidential. His father — God bless him! — was, as everyone knew, not an easy man to deal with; everyone knew, too, that his faults lay wholly on the surface. What a pity it was, then, that he had — well, such a confoundedly difficult character? Of course, having long ago given up all responsibility for his children, he had no right to object to his son's present appointment. He was not in a position to interfere. But — and here Ali sighed and gave a little laugh — with a man of that temperament you never could tell. So the situation was — a little delicate.

'Has he said nothing yet?' inquired Jali cautiously.

'He doesn't yet know,' was the answer.

Jali, somewhat astonished, kept silence. For one thing, the way in which Ali spoke of his father seemed to him rather preposterous. He looked at Ali and then he thought of Hari Khan. Surely Ali was not quite of the stature to speak of Hari Khan in a tone of indulgent superiority.

His face must have reflected some part of these thoughts, for it was with a frown of rising impatience that Ali went on. The time was fast approaching, he said, when his father would be released from Agra, but it was unlikely that he would come back to this place; and, even if he did visit again the house on the other side of the lake, there was no reason why he should not still remain in ignorance of where his son was. Indeed, he undoubtedly would remain ignorant — unless some busybody were to inform him.

'I see,' said Jali, who by this time had grasped what was expected of him. 'I see,' he repeated thoughtfully. 'But,' he blurted out after a pause, 'but what about *my* father? Hasn't *he* found out yet that you are here?'

Ali shook his head. 'Your father has only visited the camp once since I arrived, and then — well, I kept out of his way. He knows nothing.'

Again Ali's eyes were making it very plain that he was finding his cousin difficult to deal with, different from a true man of the world. With an effort Jali pulled himself together: after all, Ali's affairs were no business of his; Ali's self-importance was insufferable; what on earth did it matter where Ali was? Ali could go to the devil. Having reached this conclusion, he raised his eyes and said simply that he understood. 'I won't mention your name at all,' he added.

The other's face at once became serene again. 'The longer the time that goes by,' he observed complacently, 'the more difficult my

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father will find it to raise difficulties or to make an unpleasant scene. As I began by saying, the situation is really rather a delicate one; it calls for tact; I am glad I have made you see that.'

This, evidently, was meant as a compliment; and a little later, when they were taking leave of one another, Ali gave expression to his amiability by suggesting that they should meet again. Why should they not meet next time upon the waters of the lake? Jali could easily step across from one boat into the other, and then he could test the *Eaglet's* sailing powers for himself.

During the next few days Jali was busy examining his new surroundings, and when his mind turned to Ali it was merely to think of him as the possessor of the most beautiful boat in the world. The old Rajah's house and garden were quite unlike anything he had ever seen before; the house struck him as astonishingly ugly and odd; even the garden he considered rather ugly; but in spite of this he was far from disliking the place. The atmosphere here was completely different from that of Khanjo; and if the house itself was without beauty, the valley and the lake amply made up for it. The lake was pale in colour, an opalescent sheet of water that melted into an air that was often slightly misty. Nearly every day the sun was reflected upon it, as a pale, distant disc, a moon-like sun that floated quivering upon its smooth milky waters. Almost at once Jali became fond of the valley, the friendliness of which encouraged him in the belief that here Gokal would quickly regain his strength.

His hired boat, when it arrived, was of course not to be compared with Ali's. On the first morning that he took it out there were several of Daniyal's fairy craft scudding about under little flaws of wind; and he wondered if his cousin's was among them. It was to be hoped that Ali would prove to be nicer and more interesting than he had seemed to be at Fatehpur-Sikri. 'Perhaps,' he thought, 'I was too young to see the best of him then. God knows that I have altered since! And, maybe, Ali has altered too.' But when he considered their last meeting he felt dubious. The tone in which Ali had spoken of Hari Khan stuck in his mind as having been ludicrously smug. But then — he might have seen this before! Ali's voice had not, of course, been his own; it had been merely an echo of the world's voice; for the world, which considered Ali a very promising young man, did, sure enough, regard Hari Khan as an eccentric. Ali was obviously much more adaptable than his father. Look at the way in which he had picked up the manners and fashions

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of the Court! 'But that is just what I don't like about him,' thought Jali, and then he corrected himself by saying: 'I suppose I am jealous. Anyhow, I have no right to think of Ali as a fool; he succeeds where I should certainly fail.'

It was in no very sanguine spirit that he set out that morning to search for his cousin on the lake. Nevertheless the meeting, which took place almost at once, went off unexpectedly well. He made the astonishing discovery that Ali was not only quite agreeable, but also most interesting to talk to. Yes, it was extraordinary! It showed you how little you could tell. Ali was intensely engrossed in literature and art; he displayed a familiarity with the books, pictures, and music of the day that made one positively blush for one's ignorance. Moreover, the audacity of his opinions was often startling.

Jali went home very much impressed and not a little exhilarated. Here were new vistas opening before him, and this just at a time when his young intelligence was eager for a fresh kind of adventure. For too long already he had been suffering from over-tension of the spirit. The time had come for him to throw off material cares, to enjoy, in complete detachment from practical life, the enthusiasms proper to adolescence — enthusiasms which, whether wise or foolish, are as different from those of childhood as from those of maturity. Hitherto, although far from insensitive to beauty, he had not approached the Arts with any independence of mind. Hitherto life itself had absorbed him; life and the meaning of life had been problems instant and all-engrossing; the difficult business of living had allowed him no freedom, no self-confidence, no ambition to attend to superfluties or cultivate the luxuries of the spirit. Docile in accepting the aesthetic judgments of others, it had never occurred to him to consider whether he had a personal taste of his own; and of the pleasures of heresy, of the glories to be found in revolt, he was, of course, even more profoundly unaware.

Ali was soon to bring about a change. Ali, who had formerly seemed so wooden, so conventional, such a blockhead, now appeared as an angel of intellectual freedom and light. With the prestige and brilliance of the Camp behind him, his lightest word carried weight. Listening, Jali felt that he was listening to the voice of Prince Daniyal himself. And could anything be more exciting than that? Not for anyone in Jali's present case; not for anyone living in this neighbourhood, where the Camp attracted your attention all the time. Every day some new rumour of the Prince's doings spread round the valley;

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every day you saw some new building springing up, or heard about some new marvel that was being imported from the outside world. That extraordinary community of Daniyal's, the Camp — the Pleasance of the Arts, as it was called — shimmering at you from the other side of the lake, at once so conspicuous, so provocative, and so far removed — it was the talk not only of Ali but of all the servants, of the fishermen, everyone. Even his father and mother discussed Daniyal — in a vein of persiflage, it was true; but that, Jali knew, was the tone people often used to disguise more serious consideration.

Ali's tone in describing the brilliant society in which he now moved was naturally quite different. He had no wish to pretend that his admiration for the Prince was not overwhelming. Daniyal, in his judgment, was almost a god. With this, however, he was anxious to make it clear that his head was not in the least turned by Daniyal's worldly greatness; his admiration was not for the Imperial Prince, nor for the Darling of Society, but for the Poet, the Artist, the enraptured Lover of Beauty.

Jali was in no mood to question or dissent. He read feverishly all the books that his cousin lent to him — books that were in vogue in the Camp. He vied with Ali in composing verses in the manner favoured by the Camp; he theorized with Ali by the hour. All this was exciting in a new and delightful way. He lost the sense of being a helpless child. At a time when he was actually becoming more puerile every day, he gloried in an expanding sense of sophistication.

IN this new phase of his existence, Jali succeeded in putting his past miseries out of mind, or rather he thought of them only in so far as they added to his newly-found self-esteem. This they did by reminding him that he was a person of experience and suffering. Of Gokal, the unwitting cause of his suffering, he still saw very little; and, although his feelings for his former teacher remained unchanged, he did not wish, for the time being, to be in his company, nor even to give him much thought. The truth was, of course, that his spirit needed relaxation, and was eagerly going forth to its new interests on the other side of the lake. Most of his time he now spent on the water in the company of Ali, and a splendid holiday this was. How delightful to escape from one's self and the tyranny of things that really mattered. But didn't art, then, really matter? Were art and literature less important than the miserable cares of our material life? Certainly not! They mattered infinitely more, he would have told you; but, fortunately, in another way; impersonally, instead of personally, pleasantly instead of unpleasantly. Oh, the glorious freedom of the mind, when (as Ali said), casting off from dreary actuality, it spreads sail to the winds of the imagination, and steers for Perfect Beauty. This was the voyage upon which Prince Daniyal was set, and his inspired crew!

It was not long before Ali had to draw rather heavily upon the prestige that came from being a member of this crew. If, as sometimes happened, he said something that sounded quite incredibly foolish, there was nothing for Jali to do but pass over the remark in silence and suppose that he had not properly understood. And yet, and yet, in after days he was never willing to admit to himself that he had been completely taken in. Somewhere at the back of his mind his earliest impressions of Ali had — oh, most certainly! — still lingered. His first astonishment at finding Ali admitted into the Prince's circle had never been completely wiped out — not even by that marvellous self-assurance of Ali's, not even by that casual omniscience, nor the unfailing up-to-dateness of his information. Even in these early days his strongest argument in favour of Ali was apt to run like this: unless Ali really was what he pretended to be, one found oneself obliged to regard him as an almost unimaginable

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compound of fool and impostor. And if in very truth he was just that, how on earth was his presence in the Camp to be accounted for? These questions were unanswerable; and, outwardly at least, Ali's pontificate remained unquestioned. But a growing impatience provoked by his heavy patronage stimulated Jali's impious doubts. A certain common sense, too, was ingrained in him; he refused to believe that the Camp was as silly in its ideas as Ali frequently made out. According to Ali, for instance, the Camp taught that thinking for oneself consisted in nothing more than in reversing established opinions, that the newest thing was necessarily superior to one that came before, and that the ultimate test of the worth of an idea was its capacity to startle the Philistine and annoy him. If Ali was to be believed, there was no independence in the Camp; the Camp had its own inverted orthodoxy, and was as bigoted as any of the old schools; opinions changed often, but always unanimously; they changed, as fashions change, on the stroke of the bell.

So Ali's prestige began to go down, and presently a fresh and still more damaging light was thrown upon him. One day, as the two boys were sailing idly along, Ali (who liked to recount in much detail his conversations with distinguished personages) opened out with the remark that he had just been having a singularly interesting discussion on Persian prosody with a lady who was perhaps the most brilliant and fascinating of all the women in the Camp.

'And who might that be?' asked Jali.

'Lady Jagashri,' returned Ali complacently.

For a few moments, after hearing this, Jali found himself bereft of speech. That Lady Jagashri should be among the Prince's chosen guests was past all conceiving, and so was the notion that she and Ali had been talking solemnly together about Persian prosody. His silence was so full of astonishment and confusion that Ali, anxious though he was to get on with his discourse, paused to give him a smile. 'It almost looks as if you knew her?' he observed shrewdly.

Jali, reddening still further, murmured something about having seen the Ranee once or twice in the Agra Palace. His companion, after eyeing him teasingly, laughed. 'Pretty, isn't she?' was his comment; and with a flow of banter he made it plain that he could guess well enough what had happened: Jali had conceived a small boy's romantic passion for the lady and worshipped her from afar. Well, she certainly was pretty enough! But to go back to Persian prosody. . . .

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While he was holding forth Jali struggled to restore order in his mind. It appeared that Ranee Jagashri had already been in the Camp for two or three weeks, and that she and Ali had made great friends. Ali and Jagashri friends! And discussing Persian prosody together! What on earth did it mean? Jagashri — Heaven help her! — was completely brainless, and to his certain knowledge her true tastes did not lie in the direction of literature. If he was sure of anything he was sure of that. At Agra, in her attempts to ingratiate herself with Daniyal, she had incurred a good deal of ridicule. Was he to believe that both her intelligence and her character had become quite different since then? As he gazed at his companion, he pondered. Ali, after having finished with Persian prosody, was returning to his jocular vein. It was his habit to show himself off as a man of the world now and then, and on these occasions he would speak of women with a certain licence, as a man who regards sex as *une bagatelle*. He liked to show Jali that he could joke on the subject; but he would always draw himself up in good time out of regard for his young cousin's tender years. On this occasion, whilst listening to Ali's pleasantries, Jali was thinking hard. Could it really be true that during the last three weeks the handsome Ali had seen nothing better to do with this very pretty little Ranee than to talk literature with her? And had he really considered her conversation worth listening to? It was nothing short of incredible, and yet — there it was!

In the course of the next twenty-four hours Jali gave the matter still further thought. What was he to make of Ali, if his worldly pretensions turned out to be as hollow as his literary ones? What was he to make of those competent and disabused airs of his? Was Ali's manner, in its whole range from modest self-assurance to lofty superciliousness, simply a façade of fraud? It seemed as if it must be so; but then what was Ali doing in the Camp? Was it conceivable that he and Ranee Jagashri succeeded in taking in that sophisticated community? And, if not, what did the Camp see in them?

A few days after this, as he and Ali were cruising about together on the lake, the latter made a very startling proposal: he offered to take him for a visit to the Camp. Never had this suggested itself to Jali before even as a possibility; and it was astonishing to hear this invitation thrown out as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. Casualness of manner in Ali, however, was no sure sign of absence of premeditation; so Jali, although he demurred at first



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out of sheer timidity, soon allowed himself to be overborne. The boat was accordingly brought round, and Jali was still far from having recovered from his attack of nervousness when he found himself actually arriving before Daniyal's glittering water-front.

From a distance the Pleasance of the Arts had always looked singularly attractive; and now, on a nearer view, it seemed to Jali that the caprices of Daniyal's taste had justified themselves completely. The effect produced was that of a stage scene — a scene that would suit a gay performance of marionettes. Yes, it was a setting for creatures, half doll, half god, the exquisite descendants of the figures he had often seen upon rude stages at village fairs. There, in those simple surroundings, it was old legends and fairy stories that were enacted; but the living actors upon a stage such as this would fitly be illustrating tales of an elegant and sophisticated frivolity. It was the frivolous character of the Camp's informing spirit which at once captivated and slightly astonished him, for Ali's talk of Daniyal's revolutionary ardours had prepared him for something more earnest and severe. But this *mise-en-scène* was charming, and he at once accepted it. With the memory of Akbar's conventional magnificences in his mind, especially did he enjoy the absence of the over-ornate, the avoidance of cloying richness, the rejection of even the most time-consecrated commonplaces of design. Newly in love with the new, he was unwilling to reject any of Daniyal's novelties, if he could possibly help it. A novel silliness, springing up in protest against an old silliness, was surely the better of the two? Besides, one was entitled to suppose that it had amused the Prince, here and there, to make fun of his own innovations; he credited Daniyal with quite enough humour for that.

From the landing-stage Ali conducted him down a wooden promenade that ran along the lake-front. The whole of the Camp, in fact, was built on a platform that stood in part over the water and in part over the marshy ground behind. All the gaieties of a popular pleasure-resort were to be found here, but they had all been slightly parodied and, as it were, denatured, to suit a subtler taste. Music was sounding in the air; a bright-looking throng were strolling or sitting about; some, under fantastically-decorated awnings, were drinking snow-cooled beverages, some were watching jugglers and mountebanks, many were flocking to an arena where combats between various kinds of wild animals, including even snakes, had been announced. Everyone wore the brightest and most daring

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costumes; so much so, that on his arrival, Jali had imagined that some mask or carnival must be in progress; but Ali took satisfaction in informing him that these gaieties were of everyday occurrence, and that it was not until after midnight that the true revelries began.

Thus, from astonishment to astonishment Jali wandered on, until presently, in an open place, which formed the heart of Daniyal's architectural design, he stopped, wonder-struck, before a flight of fancy, which, by its very childishness, fascinated him more than anything else. It was a group of six trees in the centre of the square. But what unbelievable trees they were! They were golden — trunks, branches, leaves, all had the glister of gold. And in these trees were perched Daniyal's silvered doves, and amongst them were scarlet macaws, green parakeets, pink and green parrots and cockatoos, and two or three pelicans of a snowy whiteness. Ali, who was thoroughly enjoying himself, took the entranced Jali by the arm and led him up to the nearest tree; each one of the leaves he showed him was artificial, and attached to its twig by wire. The trees themselves were as dead as the planking into which they were fixed! Moreover, the whole square, Jali next had to observe, was in fact built over a piece of the lake; and down one side of it there ran an imitation canal, showing a frontage of houses designed by an Italian architect in the Venetian style. It was all marvellous indeed; and not less marvellous, now that he found time to examine them in more detail, were the human beings for whom this *mise-en-scène* had been provided. What dresses! What jewels! What brilliance of lip and lustre of eye! Who were they, what were they, these doll-like, artificial creatures? In some cases you couldn't even tell whether they were men or women! To give an answer to the question in Jali's silent, roving stare his guide complacently explained that here, in the Pleasance of the Arts, everyone was, so to speak, *somebody*. Here you might come across people of every variety — except one, the commonplace. Dull, conventional people — people who weren't lit by the divine spark, had no chance of gaining admission here. Daniyal had thrown away the shackles of ordinary prejudices and cant. Originality of mind, intellectual merit, poetic fire, these alone counted with him; and on this basis all were equal. Here you might meet Princes of the most ancient line hobnobbing with poets, acrobats and artists. Much, however, as Daniyal honoured superiority of the mind, he was not — you could see it for yourself! — an intellectual snob. Pedantry bored him; he liked to be amused;

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the art which he recognized as Art had to be for ever young and new and gay.

Jali nodded, listened, stared, and was so dazed by the diversity of his impressions that his feet stumbled as he went along. Some of the things his companion said did, occasionally, send a ripple of impatience over his wonder; some of the sights he was shown he could not in strict honesty admire. But these little points of dissidence were quickly submerged under the general flood of his enthusiasm and excitement. What a wonder and a marvel life might be turned into! How necessary was revolt, revolt against old-established prejudices, dull custom, and, above all, the bullying, nagging, disposition of Nature! In artificiality the spirit found its true life. It was proper that a light self-intoxication should carry you along like thistle-down upon the wind. Jali felt ashamed as he reflected how pitifully he had allowed Nature to tyrannize over him up to this date.

With a hundred half-finished thoughts of this kind in his head, he was quite unable to make of himself a satisfactory companion. At first his hebetude had gratified Ali, but by this time he was beginning to find it tiresome. So, after walking his speechless friend about for a little while longer, he took him down to the lakeside, and put him into a boat. On his side, Jali was nothing loath; it was a relief to him to be alone with his excitement. Wonder and enthusiasm held him spellbound, as he sat in the stern with his eyes fixed upon the receding shore. His enthusiasm became, indeed, almost devotional in character, while he gazed and gazed across the glassy water into the falling shadows of the hills. Against those misty blues and greens the Camp, like a carved moonstone, shone palely in a subdued light of its own. Pink and yellow, orange and violet, the paper lanterns made dim dots of colour on a frontage that was otherwise spectrally faint. In the midst of Nature's wilderness the Pleasance of the Arts lay perfect and complete, a little paradise of artifice and art, a small gem-like thought in an unthinking world.

FROM this day forward Jali was overflowing with an ardour for some cause that he could not clearly define; although Daniyal stood forth as the champion of it, and the Camp was its visible embodiment. As for Ali he preferred not to think about him, nor to grant him any significance. Regarded as a satellite of Daniyal's, one had to suppose that he was revolving in a very undistinguished outer orbit. Ali's conversation, which he had once found so stimulating, he now felt to be pretentious and silly. He couldn't do away with the sense that however daring Ali might be in his opinions, at heart — unknown to himself — he remained conventional and a prig. The satisfaction of holding advanced views was quite lost when an Ali was sharing them with you. There was little glory in being in the van, if an Ali was marching by your side. Sometimes, indeed, in order to avoid finding himself in agreement with his cousin he would stifle an opinion of the most enticing originality and deliberately support in its stead one that Gokal, or even his father, might not have disowned.

In his further visits to the Camp, which now followed as a matter of course, it was not long before he made the acquaintance of a good many of Ali's friends, young men of about the same age, good-looking and superciliously urbane. They disappointed him because he could not find in any one of them an ardour matching his own. Like Ali they were one and all wedded to the Arts; but their minds, unfortunately, were, one and all, like Ali's too. He found it just as difficult to account for them as for Ali; in fact, the community as a whole was presenting him with more puzzles every day. The small doubts and uneasinesses that he hoped would disappear, still dogged his admiration of the Prince. Yet there must be, he felt, a recondite intellectual position, from which, once you reached it, everything would be seen to fall into place. Those features of the Camp which, so far, had refused to look other than wilfully silly, vulgar, or trivial, would then be seen to be not really amiss, or at the worst, aberrations of no importance. After all, was it to be expected of any band of spiritual adventurers pressing forward into new territory that they should follow no false trails, or never lose their way? Thus, in a spirit faithful but still inquiring, Jali continued to seek for more light. To

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his discomfiture, however, he found that as often as he screwed up his courage to question, he was met with a cold stare. Ali and his friends were shocked. Was he, their looks asked, after all, a Philistine at heart? It almost looked as if he had no right to be in the Pleasance of the Arts at all.

During this time he did his best to avoid meeting Ranee Jagashri, but in spite of all his precautions one or two meetings did occur, and each one was more unpleasant than the last. An obscure instinct had warned him, it was true, against expecting any great show of cordiality on her part, but he had not prepared himself for a manner so exceedingly uncivil. Why was it that, whilst putting on her friendliest airs for Ali, she treated him to the most crushing snubs? Time and again he had to sit by — looking, and indeed feeling, like a small sulky boy — whilst she and Ali talked art and literature above his head. Their absurd airs of connoisseurship made him inwardly fume with rage. Well! he would say to himself afterwards, although the ambitious Ranee had succeeded in worming her way into Daniyal's company, the fact that she still considered Ali good enough to talk to was clear proof that she had not penetrated very far. Ali and Ranee Jagashri made him feel bitter, but his bitterness did not spring wholly, nor even chiefly, from pique. It pained him to think of Daniyal as surrounded by people of such little worth. Why did the Prince tolerate this scum, this fringe of frothy second-rateness? Wasn't it rather hard on his genuine admirers that they should have to stand in the midst of such a crowd? It was not that he, personally, had any wish or ambition to approach closer to Daniyal; he would have felt terribly out of place anywhere near the centre of that glittering company; but sometimes he was taken with a longing that the elect should know that he was with them in spirit; he would have liked them to be aware that there was one by whom their gay and gallant pursuit of beauty was really and truly appreciated, one who veritably understood where others only pretended to understand.

Then came the day when he had a great experience: he actually exchanged words with the Prince himself. It happened in a newly-erected picture gallery where the Camp's first exhibition of paintings was taking place. Ali, who, like everyone else in the Camp, was as great an amateur of pictures as of books and music, was kindly showing him round, and as they were standing together in the big, nearly empty room, suddenly an arm descended across Ali's

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shoulders, and a friendly hand came down at the same time upon his own arm. He looked round, and there was Daniyal himself! He was staring up into the handsome, smiling countenance of the master of the Camp. It was an overwhelming moment; indeed, the whole experience would have been overwhelming in the last degree; had not Daniyal's easy, reassuring manner quickly taken the edge off his alarm. Actually he was able to recover himself, more or less, even in the short breathing-space allowed him, whilst Ali was explaining who he was. In these moments, too, he had an opportunity of observing what charming manners his cousin had when addressing those who were his elders and superiors. His diffidence expressed itself winningly, with a flush and a hesitancy that broke up the heaviness of his habitual exterior. But Jali's attention was really fixed on Daniyal. It seemed to him that for a moment after his name had been pronounced, the Prince's countenance took on the blankness that masks a rapid movement of thought. The next instant, however, that face recovered all its former liveliness. 'I see! I see!' said the Prince laughingly. 'So you are the son of Rajah Amar, and the cousin of my beloved Ali! You are staying in that deliciously quaint old house on the other side of the lake! Dear me, how amusing!'

Jali could not understand exactly what the Prince found amusing, and had no idea what to reply; but Daniyal saved him by going on. 'What responsibilities I am shouldering, to be sure! What sins I have taken on my head! Here is Ali living with me without his father's knowledge! And now you — you visit me on the sly. What would your father say to it, my dearest child? Are you sure that he quite approves of me?' Daniyal's eyes, which were light blue, were dancing, and it seemed to Jali that they must have some quality of Akbar's, which he had heard described as 'vibrant as the sea in sunshine'.

'Tell me, Ali!' the Prince continued, swinging round. 'Tell me what kind of a boy is this little cousin of yours? Is he as demure as he looks, or will he be getting into trouble here? With those great brown eyes of his . . . I shouldn't wonder. . . .'

He was now fixing a half-mocking, half-questioning gaze on Jali, and the meaning behind it was not easy to make out. Daniyal's manners bewildered Jali; if they had quickly dissipated his awe, they had put a peculiar discomfort in its place. The Prince, he felt, was *over-mannered*, and his elegance far from patrician. But these im-

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pressions were fugitive. He was too confused to hold fast to them, and afterwards it was the Prince's amiability alone that occupied his mind. After all, here, in his private retreat, Daniyal might well be permitted to throw stiffness and formality aside.

'I have something to tell you,' said the Prince, once more addressing Ali. 'Your father has been released, and I should not be at all surprised if he were already on his way back here.' He paused and gave a little laugh. 'Does that trouble you, my dear? I see no reason why it should.'

Ali had flushed, but he made all haste to agree, and the next instant Daniyal turned to the picture before which they happened to be standing. Eagerly, enthusiastically, he began pointing out its merits, and Jali tried hard to listen to what he was saying, although, in truth, it was the man and not the picture that interested him. How, he was wondering, how could one ever tell what a man like the Prince was really thinking about? The only thing you could be sure of was that he had a lot of things in his mind at the same time. For instance, even now, while he was talking and while his fingers were hovering expressively over the picture, you could see his eyes wandering about the room. His tongue might be busy with one thing, and his eyes with another, and his brain would be attending to half a dozen matters as well.

With abruptness Daniyal came to a stop, and his gaze swept over Jali absently. 'Visit the Pleasance of the Arts as often as you like, my dear! As Ali's friend you were welcome before, and now you are welcome on your own account.'

These were his last words to Jali; but before going he bent down to Ali's ear in order to whisper something that was for him alone. While that murmur went on his arm was round the boy's shoulders again, and then, giving him a parting squeeze, he strolled off to his waiting attendants.

This meeting with the Prince had an unforeseen result. The next day Jali learnt that he was the recipient of a signal favour: the Prince invited him to be present at the opening of the great wooden theatre that was by far the most important building in the Camp. The occasion was to be celebrated by the first performance of a burlesque composed by the Prince himself. Jali was amazed, enormously flattered, and not a little alarmed. The slightly distasteful elements in his recent impression of Daniyal were entirely wiped out of his mind. For some weeks past he had been nursing a secret pro-

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ject which he now felt encouraged to carry out. This was to present to the Prince, with a suitable dedication, a small collection of verses that he had recently composed.

The intervening days were made feverish by his anticipations. From morning to night he was absorbed in polishing his verses and dreaming of the great occasion. If he had any reasons for feeling uncertain whether the play would be of superlative merit, he put this possibility entirely out of mind. It was not until the day and the hour had actually arrived that a sudden access of nervousness seized him. Shrinkingly he took his place in the great hall amongst Ali and his friends; the bright artificial light, the hot scented atmosphere, the colour and glitter of the bejewelled assembly, these stirred him to an excitement that was made painful by misgivings. It was a relief when the lights were extinguished, and the play began. Apart from a few poems and a few paragraphs of prose, the world had seen nothing of the Prince's own work as yet; this burlesque stood out as his most ambitious venture.

Ten minutes went by; and then Jali took his eyes off the stage and lifted them anxiously to Ali's face. How was Ali feeling? Was he satisfied? Was there really nothing wrong? Assuredly not! His friend's fixed complacent smile was completely reassuring. Good! With a sigh of restored confidence he turned his attention once more to the scene.

Another ten minutes elapsed, and now again he sent a glance at his companion. It encountered the same smug smile upon Ali's face; yes! Ali's eyes remained fastened upon the stage, and his expression was still one of fixed and inane gratification. But this time Jali was not satisfied; he frowned, and turned anxiously to examine the other people near him. Their expressions resembled Ali's; they all wore the same mask-like smile. But, said Jali, to himself, this is horrible! This is like some evil dream. Setting his teeth, he once more gave ear to the play; clearly there must be something in the performance that he was missing, there must be another angle of vision, there must be some subtle twist of the intelligence upon itself, which, once achieved, revealed this string of seeming vulgarities and ineptitudes as something else, as something utterly different.

Poor Jali! He waited, he struggled; but it was of no avail. His case was hopeless. He was beyond all help. In this large, glittering congregation of the elect he was an outsider, he stood lamentably



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and degradedly alone. What seemed to him to be spiteful, tasteless, and pretentious beyond all words — this very thing was being received by others with every mark of amusement and pleasure. What, then, became of his faith in a shared enthusiasm? What of his belief that he and these people were linked together by a common understanding? What of his splendid ideas for a youthful and regenerated art? And, above all, what became of Daniyal as a leader?

Well, he had made a mistake! But — what a tremendous mistake! Its magnitude so confused him that for the moment he could feel little more than blank consternation. For the first time in his life it was being given to him to view the full breadth of the gulf by which our human nature can be sundered in its estimate of what is pleasant and admirable in this world. His experience of the women in the Agra Palace had been no preparation, nor even his commerce with Gunevati. The Palace women had been trained in a different convention, and as for Gunevati, she belonged to a different natural order. But here, in this vast hall, were gathered together people that he had been led to regard as creatures belonging to his own kind — nay, he had been disposed to consider them superior, a chosen few, a little band, who, already first in the order of the world, preferred to put away pride of rank in order to labour in the open field of art. What did it all mean? His bewilderment was as ingenuous as it was complete. He was innocent of any idea of passing a moral or aesthetic judgment; there was no taint of arrogance, nor even undue self-confidence, in his condemnation of that which, seemingly, was good enough to win the approval of those who should know better than he. He was merely responding after the law of his own nature: other stomachs might accept this fare, but his rejected it. Daniyal's intentions — he saw that well enough — were satirical; but it seemed to him that personal ridicule, when addressed by young men in the Prince's position to those who were obscure and unpretentious, needed, to say the least of it, a great deal more humour and literary skill than Daniyal had at his command. And when, on the other hand, famous characters in religious history were taken by the Prince as his butts, a reverse, but equally unfortunate, disproportion between the satirist and his victims stood out. The objects of Daniyal's mockery then, indeed, appeared wholly out of his reach; they towered above him like Colossi carved in the face of a cliff; no attempt of his to belittle them could possibly result in damage to anyone but himself.

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Had the performance been specially designed to prove to the Prince's young admirer that he had been an arrant fool, it could hardly have been bettered; and as the performance dragged on, he became more and more distressed, in particular by a sense of humiliation. And yet why, he asked himself, why should he blush and glow and sweat in such a furnace of shame, when he was in no wise responsible for anything he was seeing or hearing? Finally, he resorted to the expedient of keeping his eyes tight shut and repeating poetry to himself, or working out sums in his head.

The end came at last, and he stumbled out at Ali's heels, too dispirited to care what his cousin was thinking or what he himself would be expected to say. With Ali at his side he walked dismally down the gaily-beflagged street, waiting with sardonic indifference for the inevitable flow of praise. He was let off more easily than he had expected. Ali was by nature cautious. A suspicion that the play had not quite come up to the general expectation had filtered into his brain, and he had decided to hold his hand until the Camp's verdict had been pronounced. So he confined himself for the time being to playful comments upon minor points. Had Jali noticed this? Had he appreciated that? Hadn't he been more than a little scandalized now and then? Really Daniyal was dreadful at times! When he gave rein to his delicious flippancy, there was no telling what might not slip out! But of this one could always be certain: nothing could come from him that was not redeemed by wit, by savage irony, by mordant satire.

By now they had reached the lake-side and Jali looked desperately round for his boat. It was being rowed in; but a few minutes would have to elapse before it could reach the pier. In a dream he heard Ali's complacent voice going on. The play, Ali considered, had been no food for babes. Strong meat it emphatically was. But then Daniyal knew that he was addressing a select audience. 'What did you think of his Lakshmi?' he asked suddenly.

'Lakshmi?'

'Yes. The girl who played Lakshmi in those last scenes. Did you ever see a more marvellous figure?'

He was now being the man of the world, and Jali knew the proper, bashful response. He admitted that Lakshmi's figure had seemed to him very good.

'For a long time,' Ali went on, 'Daniyal could not find anyone fitted for the part. Face and figure, you see, had to be perfect —

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absolutely perfect. And then this girl, Gunevati, turned up out of the blue. It was a great stroke of luck.'

Jali moved sharply back; he felt as if Ali had dealt him a blow in the midriff.

'Gunevati, did you say? Did you say the name was Gunevati?'

'Yes, Gunevati.'

Jali was silent for a few moments; he kept his face turned away; then — 'Gunevati is a common name,' he mumbled. 'Where — where did you say the girl came from?'

Ali shrugged. 'Heaven knows!'

'What is she like?'

'Like? — Well, you could see for yourself'

Jali groaned faintly. 'She didn't speak, surely? I didn't hear her voice.'

His companion stared at him with impatience.

'Naturally. She hadn't a speaking part. I am talking of the girl who was carried in, naked, on the golden lotus-leaf. I think you must have been asleep.'

Jali had no reply. The boat was there, and his one idea was to escape. Hurriedly he bade his companion good-bye, and took his seat in the stern. Again it was a windless evening, the lake was like a sheet of glass; and while his two men plied their oars, he looked back, his eyes fixed upon the receding shore.

All at once he started to his feet and nearly fell overboard; he bade the rowers stop.

'I want you to take me back,' he brought out in a strangled voice. 'I find I have forgotten something.'

'The boat returned and he sprang on to the pier. 'Wait for me here,' he said. 'I shall not be long.'

IT was she: there was no mistake. A few moments after he had reached the door at the back of the theatre, she stepped out, and he had to hide himself hastily among the loitering crowd. The sight of her set up a trembling in all his limbs; he peeped from behind men's shoulders, and then drew back, and then peeped again. In God's name, what did it mean, her presence here? He was aghast, feeling himself confronted with the workings of some agency supernatural and malign.

She went away with a group of her friends, all gaily chattering. He followed them with his eyes down the street until they were lost to view. The crowd was dispersing, and with an effort he pulled himself out of his daze. Furtively, by back-alleys, he hurried down again to the lake-side. The things that had been happening to him that day seemed to form no part of real life; on one level his mind was alert, and yet he was also lost in a dream.

There was a wonderful luminousness and tranquillity on the water over which he was presently gliding, and he was reminded of the evening upon which he had been rowed home from Daniyal's Camp for the first time. The little lanterns on the dusky shore were glowing with the same tints of orange, violet, and green; there was the same mildness in the air; and the rowlocks made the same monotonous creak as his two rowers bent to their stroke. Presently, too, as before, strains of music came travelling over the water; and that evening and this mingled still more closely in his wondering thoughts. The mystery of time and human destinies overwhelmed him.

But beneath the level of this dreaminess his mind, without doubt, was the scene of a great activity. Just as the temporary extinguishment of lights at a play covers a rapid alteration of the stage, so, one must suppose, his present dreaminess was not without its purpose. A change in his mental landscape had to be effected; he had to accommodate himself to a new conception of Prince Daniyal and his Camp. While his eyes were still resting absently upon the lake, while parts of his mind floated detached in the mild evening air, there passed, at the back of his consciousness, a procession of disquieting images. Ali and his complacent young friends, Daniyal and his sleek ornate audience, the lady Jagashri, and now Gunevati —

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what a strange collection they made! By what law had they come together? They must, he imagined, have something in common, apart from being in his opinion one and all detestable. Again and again, in blank bewilderment, his mind returned to the apparition of Gunevati. If she had gained in mysteriousness, the Camp had gained no less.

His boat touched the opposite shore; automatically he jumped out, and began to walk up to the house. The sky was now starry, the earth quite dark, and falling dews had put a chill into the air. Of a sudden it came over him that he had been living in a state of foolish intoxication ever since his arrival at Ravi, and that now at least he was making a return to the real. But why must reality be so drab, why must it cast such a chill? And why was he obliged to come back to it? Was there no means by which one could maintain oneself in dreams? A flash of memory took him back to his hours of madness on the night of Gokal's poisoning, those strange hours when he had been drunken with blue moonlight and fantastic ideas of revenge. But no! he knew of course that it was impossible to keep one's madness up.

He sighed, and, halting for a moment on the path, looked long and steadily at the yellow lights of the house shining down at him through the garden trees. Standing there, he experienced another change of heart. His love, his true respect, for the human beings on this side of the lake seemed to him to offer something trustworthy and admirable amidst all the shifting sands of the world. Why should he ever visit the Camp again? Why ever? The Camp was odious to him; he would give it up, he would bury his memories of it, just as he had buried his memories of Khanjo. But before this idea had fairly **taken** hold of his mind, he turned and cast his eyes backwards over the water. The lights on the far shore were twinkling behind a thin veil of mist, and while he looked at them, the voice of a secret knowledge told him that he would certainly go back. Fear clutched at his heart; he felt himself coerced.

For the next two or three days he never went out on the water at all, and during this period his uncertainties and indecisions left him not a moment of peace. If he had to go back, where would he find the patience to bear with Ali, or to suffer Ranee's Jagashri snubs? And if — if it really was his intention to seek out Gunevati — where, in God's name, would he find the courage for the ordeal? If this was yielding to temptation, how unattractive temptation

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could be! The more he pondered the less he could understand himself; for it would not satisfy him to put everything down to the instinct of curiosity. What was curiosity? Wasn't it the very energy of thought? Wasn't it even the very energy of life? Even animals were curious; and perhaps plants too. Certainly if a man were to lose his curiosity entirely he would very soon fade away into death.

By this time he was willing to admit to himself that what drew him most powerfully of all to the Camp was his desire to solve the mystery of Gunevati's apparition there. And he also argued that this curiosity was not idle, since it was his duty to investigate the girl's present disposition, and find out whether she was likely to work mischief with her tongue. Since she had it in her power to do harm to both Gokal and Hari, it was greatly to be hoped that her wholesome respect for Mabun Das persisted.

This train of thought, by which he sought to justify himself, did not, however, succeed very well in its object, for it inevitably suggested another and a more effective line of action. Why didn't he make a confession to his Uncle Hari? The latter had just returned; and his presence in the house made Jali dislike more than ever being involved in a conspiracy of silence with Ali. Up till now he had done his best to excuse himself in his own eyes by nourishing a personal grievance against his uncle. Never had Hari followed up the offer of friendship which had seemed to be implicit in his attitude on his first night in Agra: Hari had shown neglectfulness and indifference. Then, too, there was the question of Hari's relations with his mother: that raised the same barrier as before.

But wouldn't it, he now asked, wouldn't it be very wrong of him to leave Hari in ignorance of Gunevati's presence in the Camp? He put himself this question over and over again; but always shirked a plain answer. If he realized that he was no judge of the situation, he also realized that it would be impracticable to tell Hari a part, instead of the whole, of his story; so that actually the first syllable of his confession would be as critical and momentous as a dislodged pebble that starts an avalanche. Deep in his heart he suspected that the information he was withholding might have very wide bearings; but that suspicion he was going to ignore. Affairs 'public' or 'political' were no concern of his; he didn't understand them. For him the question was simply one between himself and his own people, a question of personal relations. Was he in duty bound to open the eyes of Hari and his parents to facts and

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conditions which they had no excuse for not apprehending for themselves?

At Khanjo the idea had gradually formed itself in his mind that human beings, one and all, lived in fictitious worlds which they arranged to suit their comfort. (Since then he had seen this truth exemplified in himself; for hadn't he, during all these past weeks, deceived himself with regard to Gokal's health? Hadn't he persuaded himself that Gokal was gaining strength every day, whereas in reality he was making no progress at all?) It was like this: just as the veining on a slab of marble in your bathroom might be seen by you for years as making a picture of a man on horseback, and then one day would appear instead just like a flock of birds on the wing; so, any day, something might happen inside you (or a slight jolt might come from outside) that would completely change your view of your whole situation in the world. And it was your duty, when that happened, to examine the new pattern, not to push it hastily out of mind. Well, none of the people he knew seemed ever to be willing to do this. His father and mother, Hari, Gokal — he saw them all living in blinkers, and this spectacle had brought him, in the end, into a state of cold, contemptuous rage. Let calamity befall! he now said. Those who chose the pleasures of ignorance must accept its dangers as well.

It was in this spirit that he finally made up his mind not to confess. He would go back to the Camp instead, and keep watch as best he could. Surely he had learnt something since his days at Khanjo? Surely he would make a better match for Gunevati now?

This was a vainglorious mood, but when he bethought him of his earlier vows that Gunevati should be made to pay for her iniquity, shame stabbed him to the quick. He realized that his anger had lost its effective heat; he regarded her now with wonder and repulsion, but dispassionately. She, Ali, Jagashri, and the others, they had taught him that human beings are not what you begin by thinking they are; it was a mistake to regard them as naturally guided by reason and goodwill. No, no! they were incalculable; in fact they were monsters. But — could one honestly say that there wasn't something rather fine in being a monster? Even nice people probably had a monstrous side without knowing it. And perhaps — this *came* suddenly into his head — perhaps each one of those monsters, even Gunevati, looked upon itself as a kindly-disposed, reasonable creature, and marvelled at the monstrousness of others.

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Very likely he, Jali, ranked as a veritable monster in the estimation of someone!

To his surprise he began to discover in himself a vein of admiration for Gunevati's monstrousness. The gratuitousness of her evil-doing endowed it with a certain magnificence. And most of her modes of thinking and feeling might be seen — by those with an eye for such curiosities — as marked by a similar lurid distinction. She was interesting with an interestingness which his own type, the type governed by moral fastidiousness, by sensitiveness, by generosity, must of necessity lack. Regretfully he recognized this, and his sense of loyalty to his own kind, although not diminished, was slightly dimmed.

It was curious that while his intention to seek out Gunevati was gradually gaining strength, he made no attempt to prepare himself for the actual event. Sometimes, indeed, in his reveries he would conjure up pictures of the meeting, but these were always absurdly fanciful. He would imagine himself admonishing the girl with such fire that at last, humble and repentant, she would throw herself on the ground at his feet. Very rarely did he call to mind how gay and serene she had actually looked as she was stepping out of the theatre door.

His first move, he decided, must be to seek out Ali, although unfortunately it was improbable that Ali would be very well informed. When Ali took interest in a woman it was not on account of her beauty; and when he expressed admiration for a woman's beauty, it was really her social position that he was thinking about. He had an eye for very inconspicuous charms when rank and fashion set them off; but to beauty unadorned he appeared singularly indifferent.

It was accordingly with a good deal of anticipatory impatience that Jali went to look for his friend on the lake; especially as he foresaw that Ali would be overflowing with talk about the Prince's play. He was right; but he should have accounted it a mercy that he was not called upon to go into ecstasies himself. In point of fact the badness of the play (quite apart from its vulgarity) had been glaring enough to throw the Camp into a predicament, and they were making the best of it by telling one another that, although lacking in the finish which the hand of a practised playwright would have given it, its sheer brilliance carried it off. Ali was at pains to explain this; and, thought Jali, never in his life before had he been so wordy



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and dull. It was in vain that he tried to bring the conversation round to Gunevati; Ali invariably dismissed her with some brief, supercilious jocularity. The temptation was great to let something drop that would startle his companion out of his tedious course; but good sense just prevailed.

For an hour they sailed up and down the lake, Jali becoming more and more impatient all the time. He would have suggested landing at the Camp, had he seen how, upon getting there, he was to shake Ali off. The wiser course would unquestionably be to wait until the next day, when he could visit the Camp by himself. He was still hesitating, when the decision was made for him, Ali declaring that the wind was too light to make sailing amusing and that they might as well go ashore. So ashore they went, and Jali presently found himself strolling at Ali's side without any idea what to do next. Indeed, a kind of mental paralysis had seized him, rendering him quite incapable of coherent thought. Automatically, however, he was steering his companion towards the western quarter of the Camp where Gunevati was most likely to be found. The pains-taking Ali was still discoursing on Daniyal's play; clearly he was determined to make it perfectly plain to his young cousin (although he could not say it in so many words) that the Prince's admirers were far from being disappointed.

By this time the condition of Jali's nerves was such that, whenever the trend of Ali's speech reached him, he could not help grinding his teeth. His presentiment that he was about to meet with Gunevati was becoming more and more overpowering with each step he took; nor was he blind to the desirability of saying something to prepare his companion for the occurrence. At length with a ghastly sprightliness he managed to articulate: 'I wonder if we shall run across that girl Gunevati; I happen to have met her once or twice before. In fact I — I —' At this point words failed him; but it made no difference, because Ali was not listening. Either his voice was too weak and uncertain, or Ali was too much wrapped up in his theme; anyhow, his pitiable sentences went unheard.

Their stroll was bringing them to the outskirts of the Camp. On their left the lake glittered and rippled, overhead the sun shone bright; a scattering of bungalows ran along among the alders and willows, with here and there a tea-garden gay with the lively youth of both sexes who ministered to the artistic diversions of the community. Here — Jali felt sure of it! — Gunevati would presently be

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found. His eyes roved about wildly: that pink dress over there — was that she? No! — but what about this other girl under the tree? or that one with her back turned? ‘Perhaps,’ he thought, ‘I shall catch sight of her before she sees me, and then there will still be time to swerve aside and escape. But why — why am I coming here at all? And what, in God’s name, am I to do with this accursed Ali?’

His consciousness of folly deepened until the expected shock came. At last in that array of strange faces there appeared a face that he knew. Moreover Gunevati had the advantage: she first had seen and recognized him. Now — could he believe it? — she was actually sending him the friendliest of signals. She was smiling, she had jumped to her feet! This complete absence of embarrassment on her part deprived him of his last shreds of self-possession; from this moment onwards he was a creature dazed. In a dream he saw Gunevati leave the two girls between whom she had been sitting and run down through the tea-garden to where he and Ali stood. And the next moment he was responding — sheepishly to be sure, but still not otherwise than friendly — to her greetings, which were those of an old friend. There was no insincerity in her either; not only was she without the smallest trace of a guilty conscience, but her pleasure at seeing him was obviously genuine. So complete was his disarray that for a few moments he even lost sight of the fact that Ali was standing by his side; it was Gunevati who reminded him of it by throwing beguiling glances in this young man’s direction. Hastily he murmured an introduction, and as he did so, he noticed that his cousin was not by any means less taken aback than he had expected. Ali, in fact, was stiff and staring, his fresh complexion was showing a vivid scarlet.

Events moved rapidly. Before either he or Ali found time to realize what they were doing, still less to demur, they were incorporated in the tea-party under the trees. They were seated on mats laid on the close-cropped grass, with small porcelain cups in front of them, and the chatter of three young girls buzzing in their ears. Jali was gazing at Gunevati, wonder-struck; and the longer he looked at her the greater was his stupefaction. Never before had he seen her so animated, so full of the joy of health and life. There was no pretence in it at all; nor did he even need to wonder over the warmth of her welcome; she was happy, and therefore ready — out of the abundance of her self-content — to give any familiar face an equally joyous greeting.

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While she and her companions chattered on, busy with the tea-things, busy at the game of making themselves as charming as they could, Jali managed to recollect himself a little, and it was with dismay that he surveyed the extent of the ground he had already lost. His prepared positions (if he ever had had any) were gone, never to be regained. And this had happened without his putting up any fight at all! Whatever the proper tone with Gunevati might have been, never, never, after this, would he be able to assume it. As he stared at her, he couldn't help asking himself whether the situation was really what he thought it; wasn't it possible that Gunevati was innocent? Mightn't Gokal's poisoning have been accidental after all?

These doubts were transitory; he couldn't but discard them. Wasn't it significant enough in itself that the girl made not a single inquiry after Gokal? No reference to the past fell from her lips. Nor did she even ask him about himself; and from this he concluded that she was already aware of everything; she knew perfectly well that he and his family and Gokal were now living together on the other side of the lake. Rather strangely, too, she seemed to know all about Ali, although she had never met him before. She and the two girls with her had unmistakably taken an interest in him from the first; their manner towards him showed that they were delighted to be making his acquaintance. Surely Ali should have felt this to be flattering? surely it should have put him at his ease? But it did not. Ali, that man of the world, was making it lamentably obvious that he was quite out of his element. He was gauche, he remained — even after his first surprise was over — inordinately stiff and uncomfortable. Was he in terror lest any of his smart friends should see him in this company? That hardly seemed likely, for smart people did not come this way. No, it looked as if he were simply suffering from shyness — and suffering excessively, for he didn't yet dare to look his amiable hostess in the face. This was bad; for unless Ali soon managed to become better pleased with himself, an enduring rancour would result. It was necessary, therefore, to do one's best to help him to appear to better advantage; and this Jali strove to do; but no doubt he was clumsy, and no doubt mortification and anger were making Ali unusually perceptive; at any rate he soon saw what his young cousin was up to, and became in consequence more self-conscious and more envenomed.

From now on Jali was entirely taken up with his concern about

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Ali; and this concern developed into a nervous dread of the consequences that might result from his having brought Ali and Gunevati together. Of a truth it was highly unlikely that Ali would seek to improve his acquaintance with a person of Gunevati's social standing; but Gunevati on her side might quite well take the initiative; and was Ali the man to resist persistent blandishments?

Unhappy and bemused, Jali now lost all power of speech. In a condition of helpless passivity he continued to sit in his place, whilst the light rapid chatter of the three girls flew backwards and forwards over his and Ali's heads. And then, all at once, almost as suddenly and disconcertingly as it had begun, the tea-party came to an end. Everything in a moment became flutter and confusion. With shrieks of dismay the girls recollected that they had a rehearsal to attend. Yes, actually! and when Daniyal himself was to be present, they had forgotten it! and now they were going to be late! So there was a scramble, a whirlwind of flowered muslins, and before their two guests had fully grasped what everything was about, they found themselves alone.

Most uncomfortable was the stillness that followed. Whilst they were getting ready for their own departure, Jali was hard put to it not to appear sheepish, and Ali was visibly struggling to recover his habitual manners that had so completely deserted him. His conversation in the meantime was most inauspiciously polite; it made Jali feel sure that sooner or later he would have to suffer the full weight of his accumulated wrath. Before taking leave of him on the pier, he could not refrain from muttering a few words of self-exculpation and apology. It was a mistake. Ali's brows darkened into a scowl, nevertheless he was quick to declare that their little adventure had amused him beyond all measure. Oh, he wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world!

It was an anxious and discouraged Jali that stepped back into the boat. But as soon as he was by himself again, and able to see things in better perspective, his predominating sentiment was one of outrage. The callousness and frivolity illustrated by Gunevati at every turn disgusted him beyond measure. On his way back across the lake so bitter was the rage that gathered within him that hot tears sprang into his eyes. Not once had Gunevati given a sign — not even by a look or a silence — that her wickedness was weighing upon her conscience. Had she no sentiment even of curiosity about Gokal? Had she no wish for direct news of him? He searched his memory in vain for a single sign that she was waiting for some future opportunity to talk to him alone. There had been nothing in her manner to suggest it; on the contrary, he had distinctly received the impression that her friendliness was conditional upon his agreeing that the past should be buried. And he, for his part, had appeared to accept these terms — yes, and without demur! Rage at his own tameness was mingled with his detestation of her, and a longing to punish her sprang up once more in his heart.

Yet, when he asked himself how, in the circumstances, he could have behaved differently, no answer was forthcoming. Nor did further reflection prove of any avail; its only result was to damp his fury down into a smouldering bitterness. He couldn't help seeing Gunevati's callousness and frivolity as the natural outcome of her overflowing health and happiness. She was thus constituted; her moral nature was thus conditioned. And could he, in all honesty, regard her as very singular in this respect? If health and happiness normally bred indifference to others, it was a pity; but these qualities possessed a remarkable power of self-justification no matter how they were manifested. Thus, whilst feeling outraged, he also was conscious of a check. He could not allow his moral indignation all the freedom and exuberance it craved, and a descent into more sober thinking was the result.

Surveying his recent actions, he had to admit that they had done nothing but add to his perplexities. If, in his foolish day-dreams, he had ever cherished the notion that he might bring home to Gunevati some sense of her iniquity, that illusion had received its death-blow;

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nor did it seem likely that the watch and guard that he proposed to keep over her, was going to prove very effective. The Camp had already wrought a considerable change in her. To describe that change superficially, one might say that she had taken on the Camp manner. And this manner, the meretriciousness of which was not too conspicuous in those to whom it came naturally, displayed itself at its worst in Gunevati and her friends. No degree of awkwardness or constraint could have been less attractive than the gay unself-consciousness that the three girls at the tea-party had been so proud to flaunt. How much better it was, he reflected, to be lacking in self-assurance than to possess it without sufficient justification! With her new airs Gunevati unconsciously parodied the affectations of the smart, and to his surprise Jali found persons as apparently unlike one another as his virtuous aunt Ambissa and the flighty Ranee Jagashri, brought together in his purview as creatures spiritually akin. In aping her social superiors Gunevati betrayed them much more damagingly than herself.

Then, too, with her new manner and her new assurance she had picked up a veneer of sophistication; and one could see that she was very pleased with herself on this account. The fumes of the Camp had gone to her head like wine, and it made Jali grow hot with shame to recall how recently he had been in the same case. Thank God, he was sober enough now! Heaven be his witness, that folly was left behind.

Well then! Seeing that further visits to the Camp promised him neither profit nor pleasure, would it not be reasonable to stop going there? To this the answer was, unfortunately, that his curiosity was too strong to allow him any choice; he would go back because he must.

When next he set out it was with the firm intention of avoiding his cousin at all costs; and he accordingly ordered his boatmen to take an indirect course across the lake and to land him at the pier that was farthest removed from the one Ali habitually used. When he thought of Ali, when he conjured up a picture of that young man's steady eyes, well-chiselled lips, and general air of modest self-esteem, he felt an uncontrollable surge of exasperation and contempt. His nerves, that day, were tightly stretched; he knew it; he had keyed himself up for a talk with Gunevati, and was determined to weigh his every word. But he was without confidence in himself. In the past he had always done badly; was he likely to do

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any better now? Already he had weakly allowed her to determine the footing upon which they were to meet. The truth was that he had no capacity for dealing with Gunevati, or Ali, or anyone else; the world had to be fought with its own weapons, and these were not yet in his armoury.

Sunk in gloomy thoughts he stepped out of his boat on to the pier, and, lifting abstracted eyes, the first object that met his gaze was Ali, who was leaning against a post and watching him with a faint smile. No choice was left but to approach, whereupon Ali at once inquired what had made him choose this particular pier. The encounter was unfortunate, nor did this opening promise well. Ali seemed to have his mind made up, he fell into step at his young cousin's side, and they had not gone many yards together before battle was joined. He had chosen for his subject 'those tea-shop friends of yours', and he very soon showed that he had prepared a great many slighting things to say. A disdainful amusement curled his lips as he spoke, and he made careful choice of his words. To have such 'poor, tawdry creatures' as friends argued, he feared, a certain lack of taste; but no doubt it was just as well that some people should be less fastidious than others. The thing that chiefly troubled him was Jali's extreme youth and inexperience; no doubt he prided himself on being an extremely precocious young rake, but in his, Ali's eyes, he looked merely foolish. How in the world had he made these lamentable acquaintances? Or, to put it a little differently, where exactly had Gunevati picked him up?

'I met her in Agra!'

'In the Agra Palace? I suppose she was in the service of one of the ladies there?'

Jali looked down and said nothing; he was hoping that his silence would pass as an assent. But his companion was disposed to be suspicious. 'I warn you,' he said peremptorily, 'you had better answer me.'

'Oh? Why?'

'Because, unless you make a clean breast of it, I shall have to take steps. . . .'

At this Jali laughed; and had he been content with that, all might have been well: what 'steps' could Ali possibly take? But he was boiling with rage, and Ali's curiosity offered him his chance. He set about teasing his questioner with hints and partial disclosures, and then, when he saw that nothing could annoy him more than the

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naked truth, he looked Ali mockingly in the face and made a bare-faced avowal.

The result far exceeded his expectations. Ali gasped and was still. For a minute or two they walked on together in complete silence, and then Jali began to feel nervous. Glancing furtively upwards, he observed that Ali's face was pale, very pale; his eyes were blinking, his lips quivering, altogether his looks suggested that he might be on the verge of some seizure. At this, consternation fell upon Jali; the violence of his companion's emotions completely bewildered him; they were extraordinary, abnormal in fact. He felt that they revealed a great deal — but what? He could not imagine.

At last, in a husky voice, Ali resumed speech, and now matters moved forward with great rapidity. An exchange of insults took place in regular schoolboy style, the climax being reached when Jali, in reply to something particularly offensive, declared that always, from the very first, he had looked upon Ali as a prig, a snob, and a bore.

On this they parted. Ali's fist was tightly clenched for a blow, but a lingering and perhaps mistaken regard for decorum restrained him, so he merely turned on his heel and walked away. Jali, too, moved off in another direction; he was pale and trembling, but strangely elated withal.

After going blindly along for some minutes he stopped in the shade of a little open pavilion fronting the lake. Hardly had he sat down, before a band of musicians struck up a lively tune not far behind. These strains were far from agreeable to him, but he remained where he was. As a matter of fact, it was by no means easy, in the Pleasance of the Arts, to escape from the sound of music, just as, on certain days, you could not escape from a sweet, sickly smell that hung over the whole place. This smell came from the marsh over which the flimsy structure of the Camp had been erected. Both smell and music were present to Jali's senses now, and hardly less unpleasant to him was the glare thrown up from the sunny lake. But these small physical discomforts were noticed by him only as exaggerations of the wide mental discomfort by which he was possessed. It seemed to him, as he sat there, that the Camp, taking it all in all, was a place of garish nightmare. And the fact that it wasn't impressively dreadful made it all the worse. He wasn't yet prepared to say that it was as horrible as Khanjo, but — well, he hadn't done with the Camp yet; and who could tell?



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The brief elation of combat had completely died out of him, and he was soon lost in painful endeavours to give shape to his formless fears. Without doubt he had made a bitter enemy of Ali, and it wasn't pleasant to recall the violence of Ali's rage. That rage had seemed positively maniacal in its intensity. It had revealed something dark and unintelligible. Hitherto he had imagined in his conceit that he could read Ali like an open book, but now he saw Ali joining Gunevati in the ranks of those whom he termed 'monsters'.

And then his thoughts wandered to the others that knew — to the Ranee Jagashri, and those strange young friends of Ali's, who seemed to have none of the pressure of life behind them, no speculation, no ambition, no zeal of any kind (unless you could count as zeal their preoccupation with Art, which seemed to be rather presupposed than expressed in the elegant nonchalance of their lives) — none of these people did anything to redeem the community, or even to make it more intelligible, in his eyes. As he looked out over the lake towards his grandfather's house, a longing to fly back to it seized him. Safety and goodness lay over there. But he could not, it seemed, embrace the good single-heartedly — no, not yet! He must first taste other experiences, so that, when he did reject the world, it should be with the disdain bred of complete knowledge and competence. Before embracing the good, he must be assured that he was doing it out of knowledge and strength. Or was this quibbling? If he was now justified in his present course, why should he feel such shame? When he looked back at his association with Ali, a wave of humiliation passed over him. His truck with Ali and the Camp already seemed to him more ignominious than his truck with Gunevati and Mujatta. Why was this? He could not make it out.

No not quite! But, as he examined his heart, he realized something more. It was his very sense of the Camp's sinisterness that bound him to it. He was drawn here in order to watch, and circumvent, and even propitiate, the malign powers that might otherwise do him harm. This was at the bottom of his present anxiety to find Gunevati and discover the state of her feelings towards him and his friends. His recent quarrel with Ali had sharpened this anxiety; he was actually possessed by a ridiculous fear lest he should find Gunevati and Ali already together; and it was the prick of this fear that now made him get up and begin walking hurriedly in the direction of the tea-garden. When, from some little distance, he

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espied the girl sitting by herself in the same place under the flowering acacia, he experienced a glow of relief.

But how was she going to receive him now that he was alone? Again he felt greatly relieved when she greeted him with a friendly smile. He did, however, presently detect a defensive glint in her eyes, and this made him very careful both in his manner and in what he said. His caution was rewarded, for when she had gauged his attitude, she took the initiative herself.

‘I suppose you are waiting to hear what happened to me after — well, after I left Khanjo?’

Jali murmured an assent.

Her face, while she looked him straight in the eyes, showed that she had previously decided what line to take. ‘I see you are as inquisitive as ever!’ And she laughed carelessly. ‘But I don’t mind telling you about it. Why should I?’

For a moment she paused, pursing her lips; then suddenly, nervously, she gave a look all round. That look reminded him of the glance she had sent round the forest glade at Khanjo, when first she had breathed out the name of Mabun Das. A wave of reassurance passed over him. She was still afraid of that man — even here, and Mabun Das was his best guarantee of her discretion.

Well! she began, some little time before her disappearance from Khanjo she had found a means of acquainting Prince Salim of her whereabouts, and the Prince, who was still furiously in love with her, had at once taken steps to secure her abduction. A lieutenant of his had appeared in the neighbourhood, and with him a small body of men who were to escort her to Allahabad. Everything went off as arranged; and for three days all had been well. Then, on the evening of the fourth day, as they were journeying through a desert-place sudden disaster overtook them. They found themselves surrounded by armed men; the six horsemen who rode at her side were set upon and all killed except one. On the next day this poor wretch was castrated, and dispatched to Salim with insulting messages from his brother. For it turned out that they had been betrayed into the hands of Daniyal, who had spies even in his brother’s court and took pleasure in playing such tricks as this upon him whenever it was possible. So now she was kept prisoner in a small clay hut for what must have been nearly a fortnight, pending the arrival of more particular instructions regarding what was to be done with her. Fortunately, her beauty had now been reported to the Prince in

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such terms that he was taken with the desire to look upon it himself. Accordingly she had been brought to the Camp. But during this journey she had lived in a state of terror. What was she to do if Daniyal submitted her to cross-examination. Mabun Das had bidden her be silent on all matters under pain of death; Daniyal, had he reason to suppose she could tell him anything interesting about his brother, would certainly threaten her with torture. Her position seemed truly terrible. But directly after her first interview with the Prince this nightmare was lifted, and she found herself raised from hell into a veritable paradise. For Daniyal had no thought of questioning her; the moment he set eyes upon her he stood gazing spell-bound. She looked, he declared, a very incarnation of the goddess who was to appear in his play. So he bade her strip, and at the sight of her body, he actually pirouetted with delight. Thus, in a few seconds, her fortune was decided. After patting her cheek, tilting up her chin and laughing into her eyes, he dismissed her; and since then her life had been a dream of happiness, for she was turning into a great actress.

Towards the end of this narrative Gunevati's eyes had begun to sparkle again, and it was with a charming zest that she now launched into a description of the honours and splendours of her present mode of life. As he looked and listened, Jali underwent an unexpected change of feeling; he became conscious of a small stir of compassion. The plain truth was that she had been miserable under Gokal's roof; the pale, but lovely, listlessness of her air in those days was now replaced by an animation that made a different creature of her. At Khanjo she had languished, she could not help it; here she found an atmosphere that suited her; she was happy and she could not help that.

Presently, tired of talking, she lay back at full length on the grass and gave a contented sigh. Thank heaven, there was no rehearsal that afternoon, she said; she had been working very hard of late on a new play of Daniyal's in which she had a speaking part. She loved the theatre passionately; she was like the Prince in that, for he, too, preferred the dramatic art to any other. How wonderful his play had been! Oh, the Prince was an intellectual giant; there was no doubt about it. Jali said nothing; he had already discovered at the tea-party what her views were about the Prince and his play. Besides, not to argue with Gunevati was an old-established principle of his.

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There was a slight pause, and when she next turned to him, he could see that a fresh topic had come into her mind. Raising herself upon one elbow, she gave him a lovely, coaxing glance from beneath her lashes; it was a glance the meaning of which he understood; it said: 'Now we will talk about something really exciting: we are going to find the most thrilling and confidential things to say to one another.' This look in her eyes took him back to the little Hindoo temple in the Agra woods, and again a contemptuous pity stirred within his heart. When she looked like this her vulgarity fell away from her, she seemed childlike. Still smiling, she drew herself a little closer towards him and whispered: 'You must — you simply must — tell me everything about Ali.'

Jali was considerably surprised. 'But what can there be to say about *him*?'

'Oh, you know! Everything!'

'About Ali?' He eyed her in perplexity. This, surely, would not be her manner if she had fallen in love? No, she seemed rather to be begging for an amusing piece of scandal. 'I can tell you that Ali is a perfect fool,' he said, a reminiscent flush rising in his cheeks.

'A fool!' laughed Gunevati appreciatively. 'Yes, isn't he! — unless, she added, reflectively, 'unless, you know, he is really very, very cunning.'

'I don't understand,' said Jali.

'You don't understand?'

'No.'

'But you must! I am talking about Ali and the Prince.'

'What about Ali and the Prince?'

She became impatient. 'Ali and the Prince! How much is there really between them?'

Jali was silent. He was now keeping his eyes fixed on the lake and trying not to let his expression betray him. He did not yet understand fully, but he had the feeling that a light had dawned, and that at last he was going to understand Daniyal and the Camp much better. If only he could get Gunevati to go on talking . . . and if at the same time he went on thinking hard. . . .

'Tell me first what *you* know,' he suggested.

Gunevati was not unwilling. She went off at a great pace in a very confidential tone, and with knitted brows Jali concentrated upon the implications that lay underneath the froth of her speech. She, of course, was far from realizing how illuminating she was.

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And indeed it seemed to him, as the light in his mind increased, that his blindness hitherto had been almost wilful. He was still confused; he was still far from grasping the whole breadth of the meaning that underlay her words. But surely it was significant enough that her gossip was that of the whole community, and her tone the tone of the entire Camp.

With all the adroitness at his command he hid his ignorance; he even pretended to join her in speculations which seemed to him perfectly fantastic. He simply could not conceive Ali in the character that she imputed to him; indeed, as he now realized, Ali had unwittingly stood as a screen between him and the truth about the Camp. She might be right — she certainly was right — in her view of the Camp, but about Ali, surely, she was quite absurdly wrong. However, it was not Ali that he was now interested in; it was the Camp. While Gunevati was pestering him about Ali, his mental gaze went far beyond to take in the whole prospect offered by Daniyal and his extraordinary community. At this panorama he stared fascinated, and presently, finding that Gunevati's talk was merely distracting, he got up and took leave of her. But not before they had arranged to meet again the next day.

Oh yes, he had been very dull-witted! He could now think of a hundred things that might have opened his eyes — not merely things seen and heard at the Camp, but chance comments, shrugs, and silences, on the part of his father and others. He remembered in particular one occasion when he had heard Hari and Gokal discussing the Camp. They had agreed that it owed its existence to the Prince's need of a pleasure-ground — a place well removed from the Emperor's eye, where he would be free to conduct life after his own taste, without fear of observation and censure.

How completely, too, he had failed to come to an understanding of Ali. Indeed, his cousin's character still puzzled him greatly. Granted that Ali had an inborn instinct to shut his eyes and turn away from all knowledge that was inconvenient, did that make him a fool? If Ali had the art of avoiding experiences that were likely to teach him what he didn't want to know, was he the less intelligent for that? If he used his counterfeit knowledge of the world as a protection against deeper understanding, if his pretensions were primarily of service in deceiving himself, was that attitude necessarily a stupid one? Assuming that it didn't please him to probe down to the heart of things, what then? Or, to shift one's ground a little, if he *was* a fool, wasn't it all the same very wily of him to be a fool in just the way he was?

These reflections carried Jali far; but they were of no use to him the next day, when Gunevati reopened her topic. He had hurried to his rendezvous with eagerness, greatly hoping that he would be able to appear less unsophisticated. He felt this important, because there were numerous points on which he wanted more information; and in their last talk Gunevati had shown herself rather impatient of his naivety. It disappointed him, then, to find that he was still quite unable to answer her questions about Ali in an intelligent manner, and when she repeated that Daniyal was very much captivated by Ali, and that the attention of the whole Camp was fastened with breathless interest upon those two, he could still do no more than gape. But, while she was talking, there flashed into his mind a recollection of the eager, inquisitive looks that the three girls had bent upon Ali in the tea-garden. There had been a mixture of

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curiosity, envy, and reluctant admiration, in that scrutiny, which did, when he came to think of it, seem to bear out what she said. And then, another idea occurred to him: Could any part of Ali's persistent self-consciousness have been due to a guilty conscience — or at least to a glimmering suspicion of what those looks meant?

The day before, he had insisted very sincerely that Ali was a fool, an innocent and uninteresting fool, and nothing more. But now strange doubts presented themselves. He remembered Ali's face of maniacal rage at the time of their quarrel; he remembered the scene in the picture-gallery when the Prince's arm had rested so lovingly on Ali's shoulders, and Ali had blushed coyly at the touch. And finally he remembered a certain belt — a magnificent belt — that Ali had recently displayed; he remembered that, when questioned about it, instead of boasting that it was a gift of Daniyal's, Ali had revealed the donor's name with a good deal of embarrassment.

As a result of these reflections Jali lost some of his inward assurance, but he continued to assure Gunevati that Ali was a prig and a prude. Hadn't she noticed his manners at the tea-party? How could she reconcile manners like that with . . . ? But no! Gunevati was unmoved. Ali guileless and unsuspecting, good heavens, what an idea! Had he not been living in the Camp for weeks, even months? As for his uneasy manner with young women, that had struck her as a very suspicious sign; it was precisely among youths like Ali (you could call them prigs and prudes, if you liked) that people like the Prince found their most promising material. She wasn't arguing that Ali had already been seduced, but how could he fail to know that he had been taken in the Camp as a candidate for seduction? He was being studied, he was there on approval, he had to grow up in the way he should go, or eventually he would get his dismissal. Daniyal didn't want to hurry him: that was evident: the Prince was being unusually patient, and Ali was making unusually pretty play with his prudery. It was absurd to maintain that Ali didn't know what he was doing, quite absurd.

That day, before they parted, Gunevati was pestering him to bring Ali to see her, and after a little prevarication he saw nothing for it but to tell her the story of their quarrel, and even to let her know that Ali did not consider her society good enough for him. To his astonishment she not only took this in perfectly good part, but let him see that she held Ali in greater esteem than before. Not

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only did his story strengthen her in her view of Ali, but he was compelled to recognize the strange fact that homosexual proclivities inspired her, with genuine respect. This attitude of mind was the more remarkable in that she herself had, confessedly, none. She was simply accepting the standards of the Camp, accepting them with a docility and whole-heartedness that contrasted strikingly with her resistance to the influence brought to bear upon her by Gokal.

From this time forward not a day passed without his spending an hour or so in her company, and he found her irresponsible gossip far more illuminating than Ali's disquisitions had ever been. When not talking literature Ali had occupied himself mainly with questions of social position, polite usage and fashion. Gunevati, on the other hand, gave him intimate details about the private lives of the outstanding personages in the Camp. In tone and subject-matter his two instructors could hardly have been more unlike, and yet it often struck him that fundamentally they had much in common. To each the voice of fashion was absolutely peremptory: what fashion enjoined, that they were eager to accept, repeat, believe, and practise, without ever a thought of dissent. In Ali's case, it was true, conformity was not always quite easy, for there was a good deal in his present surroundings that his earlier upbringing had not prepared him for. On the other hand, Gunevati had no moral prepossessions to confuse her, she could accept the Camp's view of itself without any blinking or turning aside. For her, homosexuality was at once a delectable piece of naughtiness, a badge of intellectual distinction, and the leaning natural to sensitive and superior personalities. In the course of her talks to Jali all these attitudes were illustrated in turn: sometimes her eyes would dance with the delight of scandalization, sometimes they would grow large with respectful admiration, sometimes they would darken with indignant sympathy, as she cited some instance where the 'elect had suffered from the misjudgments of a coarse and prejudiced world. It was one of her pleasures to sit with Jali in some quiet corner of the promenade from which they could watch the crowd that paraded up and down; and as this or that notability went by, she would nudge her companion and produce some new titbit out of her store of scandal, and the uglier the story was the greater the zest and pleasure revealed by her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Proof, if anyone could be, against the smallest infection from her



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enthusiasm, Jali would listen with deep attention; but, when she was not looking, he would fix upon her a cool and wondering gaze. Particularly strange did it seem to him that this girl, who had taken part in the ceremonials of the Vamacharis, should find it possible to take such pleasure in the small self-conscious immoralities of the Prince's sleek friends. Perhaps those past experiences of hers had meant nothing to her? Perhaps her nature could vibrate only to the notes sounded by the Camp? This remained a puzzle to him; but through her he learnt a great deal nevertheless. He came to comprehend that the pleasure which the Camp took in regarding itself as scandalous was actually the chief source of its inspiration, its principal well-spring of energy. It was true that, for the appreciation of the finer shades of their own meanness and malice, Daniyal's friends had to look to themselves and be their own audience — they had to depend upon the clack of their own tongues; upon their own giggles and shrieks, for the applause due to any particularly subtle stroke in the game; but, broadly speaking, what sustained them, what carried them along and inspired their activities, was the belief that they were attracting the attention of an outraged outside world. The Camp was withdrawn because it had to be, moreover, the idea that they were sufficient unto themselves was very necessary to them; but it was nothing else than the truth, that they depended basically upon a solid, shockable world of decorum and common sense. They had to believe that a great ox-like eye was fixed upon them in horror. Without this their lives lost their point.

It required no great perspicacity in Jali to make this discovery, for most of the Camp's weaker members were constantly betraying themselves. And it was not only in regard to sex, but equally in discussing art and letters, that Jagashri, Ali, and nearly all Ali's friends, would succumb to the temptation to sit down to a long bout of gloating and chuckling over the supposed scandalization of the old-fashioned and censorious. This was a form of self-indulgence that had always filled Jali with embarrassment; and now at last he understood quite clearly that, although art might be an end unto itself, the Camp was decidedly not. What the Camp needed, it needed as imperatively as his father needed the truth of Buddhism and his mother the love of God. Was it not strange? Some people in order not to faint by the wayside had to postulate a moral law, some had even to have recourse to the notion of a loving God. For such

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exigent persons nothing would do but to find a meaning in the universe as a whole — a meaning that would link the courses of the farthest stars to the smallest movements of the human heart. How much more reasonable, how much more modest were Daniyal and his friends! Accepting this world as a stage, they asked only for a little finery in which to dress up and an audience easy to shock.

And yet, although he despised the Camp with one side of his mind, Jali was still fascinated by it. The glamour that formerly invested it had not faded out, but had turned into an evil glamour. The Prince, too, continued to be a very intriguing person in his eyes. If he surveyed him with disgust, that disgust was accompanied not by indifference but by curiosity. The heights that he had looked for were not there; but undoubtedly there were depths to explore.

So his visits continued; and he now took to crossing the lake at night. This was done largely out of bravado, although his ostensible reason was that Gunevati's rehearsals, occupied her during most of the day. He had no difficulty in slipping out of the house after everybody had gone to sleep; he would steal down through the garden to the little cove where his boatman would be waiting, and in a few minutes he would be sliding over the still water towards the coloured haze and the music that marked the position of the Camp.

Very little pleasure did these night excursions give him. Ali's friends (who now used to cut him dead) had been uncongenial, but Gunevati's were no better; their manners jarred upon him; their high spirits, whether genuine or pretended, were very noisily expressed; and their diversions soon palled. He would leave the crowded dancing- and gambling-halls with aching limbs, seared eye-balls, and a throbbing head. On his way back across the lake in the chill of dawn his thoughts would turn sadly upon the contrast between these people and himself. Although he despised them, he envied them. What was it that enabled them to drag themselves up, morning after morning, from the ashes of last night's revelries, ready to paint their haggard faces with the hues of health, and to begin all over again? Such zest, no matter how aroused or how directed, did them a good deal of credit. In a world so full of the drab, the tedious, and the terrifying, it was after all rather fine to remain trivial-minded and to enjoy one's trivial-mindedness.

In this mood of his a shallow world-weariness was no doubt masking unconfessed pleasures of self-admiration; but he was not to

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be allowed to indulge himself in these for very long. His first intimations of an approaching change came one evening when he was sitting with Gunevati and a little Persian actor, who called himself Mansur, at a table outside one of the big pavilions where she and her friends had been dancing. It was a hot windless night, and the hour was late; the noisy party had dispersed, leaving the long table empty save for these two who were sitting together at one end under the light of a large paper lantern, whilst he, alone at the other end, had pushed his chair back into the shadows and was watching them with that dreamy, yet fixed, attention that extreme lassitude sometimes brings.

Earlier in the evening he had noticed that Gunevati was not in good spirits, and he could guess the reason why: people were beginning to say that she would never make a good actress. Mansur, on the other hand, had a small, neat talent which he never, overstrained; he was secure in the Prince's esteem, whilst she ran some risk of losing her part in Daniyal's new play. Would the flatteries that she was lavishing on Mansur induce him to help her, or to put in a good word for her? Jali doubted it.

Mansur was a stocky little man with a long body and short legs. Although Gunevati was doing her utmost to entertain him, his flat, vacantly arrogant face was not even turned towards her. In the task of pleasing him she was handicapped, as she well knew, by his being completely indifferent to women; moreover she lacked the particular kind of finesse which, of all human qualities, alone commanded his respect. Now and then — without meaning to — she would say something that did have the effect of amusing him, and then his eyes would twinkle and he would look round for someone with whom to share his sense of her absurdity. Gunevati was not thin-skinned; but her animation had not been very spontaneous to begin with, and it did in the end succumb to this treatment. She fell silent; she looked round the deserted terrace and sighed.

The cessation of her talk made Jali suddenly aware of the silence about them. Only the musicians and dancers in the pavilion were still lively, still pouring their confused clamour out into the night. Mansur yawned. He was not tired, his face was fresh, his expression complacent; but most unmistakably he was bored. He sipped at the glass in front of him, and after a little while a thought came into his mind and he began to smile. 'My dear, I must tell you,' he chuckled: 'this afternoon I changed my religion. I joined the Din Ilahi.' With

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twinkling eyes he rocked gently in his chair, and, for want of a better audience, looked round at Jali. 'I took the oath before the Prince, who was dressed up in his white robes. Daniyal is now my High Priest.'

Gunevati sighed. She had been fondly hoping for some vague promise, or encouragement, or consolation, but evidently Mansur was intending to ignore all her former efforts. Quiet laughter was shaking him, and, servile, she did her best to look amused.

'Why don't *you* join the Din Ilahi, my dear? Think how pleased the Prince would be!' and he turned his face to her for the first time. Its large, flat expanse was broken by a beaklike nose and small unrevealing eyes which Gunevati did not care to meet.

She laughed uneasily. 'I shouldn't mind joining, if I thought it would make any difference.' Both Jali and Mansur knew that superstition was holding her back. She was afraid of offending the many gods to whom she owed allegiance.

Mansur's fat little fingers again began to tap upon the table, and Jali suddenly felt certain that never in the course of that man's life had a single generous sentiment entered his heart. Not long ago he would have puzzled over Mansur; he would have looked for the hidden spark; but now he knew better — or he thought he did; and although his nature shrank from Mansur with unconquerable dislike, his mind surveyed him coolly. On the other hand, when he looked at Gunevati, he was moved by a certain compassion. Dimly he felt that she lacked something — the kind of flair — necessary to become a successful member of this community; in these moments there came to him his first presentiment that here she might, perhaps, meet with her destruction.

Mansur's eyes began to twinkle again, and he threw Jali a glance that invited him to share in the entertainment. 'I hear that the Princess Lalita is to arrive quite soon. She is going to take a part in the Prince's play.'

At these words the blood rushed into Gunevati's face. 'The parts are all filled. I don't see where she can come in. Besides, who says that she can act?'

'Oh, I expect she can act well enough. She wouldn't, I suppose, be given an important part.'

Gunevati's silence was piteous; but at last she rallied a little. 'Mansur, why shouldn't there also be a private performance of the play as the Prince originally wrote it? About half a dozen scenes

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have been completely cut out, apparently. And I have heard . . .'

'No, no no!' Mansur lifted his hands from the table in horror.

'But . . .'

'No, no! Quite impossible!'

'But the Prince doesn't think so.'

'I do. And what is more, I have told the Prince I won't have anything to do with it.'

The little man spoke with an air of disdainful finality. Nevertheless, after a pause, he took up the subject again. He embarked upon a long rapid speech to which Jali found it impossible to give attention. The gist of the matter, as he already knew, was this: in the first version of his play Daniyal had introduced certain scenes in which the chief Ministers of State, and even the Emperor himself, were put upon the stage and held up to ridicule. One or two of the more reckless spirits in the Camp were encouraging Daniyal to get up a private performance of these scenes; but the idea was rejected by the community as a whole as imprudent in the last degree.

Gunevati sighed regretfully. 'The Prince promised me one of the best parts in that version of the play,' she murmured.

Mansur gave her a quick look. Her head was bent over the table, and she was tracing a design on it with the tip of her finger.

Silently he began to laugh. 'And you accepted?'

'Yes.'

Mansur turned his face deliberately round to Jali, and nothing could have been more eloquent of contemptuous amusement than the lines of his pursed lips and narrow eyes. Jali stared into that face, fascinated, but his tired brain was dull in making out the message it conveyed.

'Dear, dear!' ejaculated Mansur, and suddenly the whole expanse of his countenance creased into a hundred wrinkles; he shook his head gently, and gently rocked in his seat.

For at least a minute nothing more was said. Gunevati raised her head, and, after glancing at Mansur she actually winced; indignant, a muscle in her throat began to quiver, and Jali guessed that she was not far from tears.

Mansur picked up his glass, drained it, and put it down with a finished gesture. 'I must be going,' he said negligently, and his dangling toes felt for the ground under his chair. 'If you take my advice, my dear, you will join the Din Ilahi before you think about accepting a part in that play.' With indifferent familiarity he patted

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the girl's bare shoulders. 'Nothing dangerous in the Din Ilahi!' he laughed. 'Quite the reverse! Ah, here is someone coming to tell you your fortune, or are you afraid of that too?'

Gunevati turned her head sharply, and the look she threw at the approaching figure was one of undisguised aversion. It was an attendant of the establishment, whose business it was to go round telling fortunes, distributing favours, or playing clownish tricks, for the amusement of the guests. These creatures were dressed in fantastic costumes and had their faces painted so extravagantly that they ceased to look human. After executing a few comic dance-steps, the clown came up and handed to each a little object taken from a basket on his arm.

'Why not have your fortune told?' suggested Mansur teasingly.

'No,' replied Gunevati, and, turning to the clown with angry eyes, said in a loud voice: 'Go away.'

Opening his packet, Jali found three little paper bags of tinsel dust, which, thrown at passers-by, would burst, leaving a bright splash of gold or silver upon the victim's dress. Mansur had been given a fan, and Gunevati a large gilded walnut. These nuts usually contained a slip of paper inscribed with amorous and complimentary verses. When her walnut was handed to her, Gunevati's hand closed upon it quickly, but she made no movement to open it. She continued to look up at Mansur, who was standing at her side, and her expression was anxious and appealing.

'Would it really please Daniyal if I were to join the Din Ilahi?' she faltered.

Mansur shrugged. 'Look in your nut,' said he, grinning over his shoulder. 'Perhaps that will give you a piece of good advice.'

And now, to Jali's astonishment, Gunevati, who had taken all Mansur's previous gibes so tamely, threw him a look of undisguised rage, and seemed about to make a vicious retort. Mansur ceased grinning, and began to walk away. Still staring after him, Gunevati retained for several moments an expression that seemed to Jali quite extraordinary. What had there been in the man's last words to rouse her to this extent? They had sounded like a harmless little joke.

For a few minutes longer he and she sat there in silence. When they got up, she said she was going home, whilst he dragged himself down to the lake-side to be taken back across the sleeping water.

HE found he had a good deal to think about. To begin with, it had become clear that Gunevati must really be regarded as 'in love' with the Prince. To be sure, he had, in a way, known this before. How could he have failed to know it, when she had often confessed it to him — prided herself upon it in fact. But he had never taken her seriously: her admiration had seemed too preposterous, her infatuation too fantastic. Besides, he could see that it had been, in part, her object to shock him; for she had caught from the Camp its irresistible craving to scandalize. This had come to his notice in one of their earliest talks together, when she had made the barefaced confession that she was bitterly envious of the attentions Ali was receiving from Daniyal. What wouldn't *she* give, she had said, for a single one of those glances and smiles that the Prince lavished upon that miserable ninny! And a little later, when he had allowed himself to express his own abhorrence of the Prince, she had insisted upon declaring her admiration for just those characteristics of Daniyal's that were most proper to excite disgust. Since then, too, she had consistently gloried in the Prince's vileness, asseverating that it was *that* that endued him with his special charm and glamour in her eyes. Surely a good deal of this was affectation? Had Daniyal's vileness been exemplified on a grandiose — or even a dignified — scale, had she been able to point to spectacular villainies, Jali would have suspected her less, — would have been able to enter into her feelings, if not with sympathy, at least with a certain understanding. But when he inquired of her what crimes the Prince had committed, what great lusts or cruelties were attributable to him, she had nothing to reply. Her stories were of meannesses, trickeries, and deceptions, all of a most contemptible pettiness.

Her conversation with Mansur provoked in him a fresh curiosity and uneasiness. It contained allusions that were mystifying; for instance, what had Mansur meant by saying that there might be a message for her in the walnut. The more he thought about it the more certain he became that Mansur's remark had not been simply an innocent little joke. It had thrown Gunevati into the kind of rage which he knew to be a symptom of alarm. The incident reminded

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him that for some time past she had been subject to sudden fits of nervousness. In the middle of a lively party her manner would change, her gaiety would drop, she would become absent-minded, her eyes would wander. What did these things, taken together, point to? A child of his age, Jali was at no loss for a reply. Her pleasure was spoilt by a sudden consciousness that she was being watched, that she was under the eyes of a spy; in fact, with his knowledge of her circumstances he might well conclude that she felt the shadow of Mabun Das fall upon her. After all, wasn't it almost certain that Mabun Das did have spies in the Camp, and wouldn't Gunevati be an object for their special surveillance? As this idea took shape in his mind he was filled with satisfaction. His recent fears lest she should be sliding into a dangerous path were greatly relieved; it reassured him to reflect that she was receiving constant reminders of the spiritual presence of Mabun Das.

The next day, in accordance with a carefully thought-out plan, he invited her for a row on the lake, and took the oars himself, leaving his boatmen behind. Although the sun was hot, and she preferred to dawdle along under the shade of the alders, he rowed obstinately out into the lake, nor did he stop until there could be no question but that they were well out of earshot from the shore or from any other boat. He had noticed that these were the conditions in which Gunevati was most likely to be communicative.

Dropping his oars, he let the boat lose way, and very soon Gunevati's trailing hand made not the faintest ripple on the glass-smooth water. The sun was lightly veiled in a white haze overhead; it was not long after noon, and the whole earth seemed to be taking its siesta. After looking all about him, Jali brought his eyes to rest upon Gunevati, who was stretched out on the bottom of the boat. For a minute their looks met, and he could see that she guessed what was coming. Without further ado he questioned her about Mansur and the walnut, and besought her to confide in him.

Gunevati sat up; she, too, cast a swift glance all around; then, hanging her head and shoulders over the side of the boat, she appeared to be taking counsel with herself.

He said: 'I think you have a suspicion that you are being watched.'

She gave a nod.

'Mabun Das has spies in the Camp?'

He could not see her face, which was turned to the water, but she made a small sound of assent.



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‘Tell me about it?’ he urged.

Without any change of position, she began, after a while, to speak. She told him that he had guessed rightly in attributing her nervousness to Mabun Das’s spies; but, as her story developed, he soon found that his surmises had hardly carried him far enough. Her watchers had a mode of procedure that was truly extraordinary; he could only suppose that the wily Mabun had a variety of methods, and that he had chosen for Gunevati the one which he considered the most appropriate. It appeared that on the last night of her journey, when her kidnappers were bringing her to the Camp, a mysterious voice had spoken to her out of the dark to deliver words of warning. Let her not forget, it said, that in the Camp, as elsewhere, the ears of Mabun Das would hear every word she spoke, and that the smallest indiscretion on her part would be visited with terrible punishment. Then the same voice issued instructions; it prescribed what answers she was to give to the questions that Daniyal was likely to put to her. Three times the warning and the instructions were repeated, and then all was still in her tent. Ever since that night, however, a reminder had been placed, at intervals, before her eyes. A few days after her establishment in the Camp, a little picture of a human head with the tongue protruding, and a dagger thrust through it, had appeared upon a piece of paper on her dressing-table. And regularly after this the same warning would crop up, only, by progressive simplifications, the drawings had become an ideograph that would be meaningless to anyone excepting herself. It was reduced to a sign consisting of an oval with a line cutting into it and another line at right-angles to the first. Week after week this sign continued to appear — sometimes beside her plate at supper, sometimes in a letter slipped under her door; she might even find it inscribed in the dust of her path as she started out for a walk.

All the time she was speaking her head remained bent over the lake, her hand dabbled idly with the water, and her voice sounded quite calm. But in that calm there was more than a hint of weariness; nor did Jali fail to suspect that this mood might very well be the reaction from quite another. He could easily picture her rolling upon her bed and sobbing and biting her nails in an ecstasy of nervous rage and foreboding. His own heart, as he was listening, had certainly hastened its beat. There was something rather sinister in the treatment that was being meted out to this girl, whose life had appeared to him, a short while ago, completely irresponsible and

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carefree. He was stirred, excited, filled with a sense of the extraordinary; and these feelings were suffused with a satisfaction, which poor Gunevati was certainly not in a position to share. In his view a little intimidation was by no means out of place; he was not sorry to learn that Mabun Das preserved a sense of his responsibilities.

These sentiments, however, were private; and he was careful not to appear lacking in sympathy. Indeed, the droop of her figure, the bowed head, the lifeless tone of her voice, did awaken his pity. Not only was she despairingly in love, not only was she falling from success to failure, but Mabun Das's treatment was, evidently, beginning to tell upon her nerves. Presently he began to ply her with questions.

Her replies were inarticulate, almost inaudible. She shook her shoulders peevishly, she begged him to desist. Sitting up in the boat, she pressed her cold wet hands over her eyes and gave a deep sigh. 'Take me back into the shade,' she said.

Without stirring, he continued to gaze at her.

'Gunevati!'

'Yes?'

'Aren't you tired of the Camp yet? Wouldn't you like to leave it?' She gave a small, contemptuous laugh, that was like a sniff.

'No.'

'But . . .' He lacked the confidence to finish.

She looked out over the water with melancholy eyes and repeated her little sniff. 'Oh, I know. Princess Lalita is coming. That poor fool! What does she come for? He can't bear the sight of her. But I don't mind. Let her come!'

This was not what Jali had been thinking about. 'I don't mean that,' he stammered. 'I was wondering . . .'

'If I should lose my part. Oh yes, that may happen.'

'If I were you, I should hate the Camp. I should detest it!' exclaimed Jali with sudden vehemence.

She shook her head, and with her eyes fixed upon the distance, smiled sadly. 'Oh, you don't understand.'

'Gunevati! Can't you give up loving Daniyal when you see that it is so useless, so stupid?'

The smile lingered about her mouth; then slowly she brought her gaze to bear on him, and in its melancholy it was almost tender.

'You don't understand,' she repeated in a murmur. 'All that makes no difference.'

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‘Daniyal!’ he exclaimed with bitterness. ‘Daniyal of all people!’

Her expression remained unchanged. ‘Do you think one falls in love with a person because he is “nice”?’ she asked very gently.

Jali had no reply. After a moment he picked up his oars, and in silence they rowed back to the Camp.

The next few days went by quite uneventfully, but his thoughts about Gunevati continued to be perplexed and uneasy. Not long ago, he remembered, she had seemed to him to be without a care in the world; now he knew that beneath the frivolous surface of her life two strong currents of emotion were flowing: one was the fear that Mabun Das had laid upon her, the other was her feeling for Daniyal and the Camp. The expression of her eyes, the tone of her voice, haunted him. She had said to him once before: ‘I *love* the Camp!’ and he remembered now that she had said it in such an accent that he had been startled.

His uneasiness had the effect of making him more observant, and he became more attentive to the rumours which at this time were flying about the Camp in great profusion. For some time past he had been dimly aware that a spirit of unrest was abroad, but he had attributed it to the jealousies aroused by the approaching fêtes — more especially the production of Daniyal’s new play. It now became clear to him that there was something more in the air. One day he heard it reported that the Emperor was threatening to pay Daniyal a visit, another day it was said that, hearing that his son’s play contained offensive material, Akbar had issued a peremptory order that the theatre should be closed forthwith, and the Camp broken up. A third and still more fantastic report was to the effect that the Emperor himself had actually visited the Camp in disguise — with consequences that were going to be disastrous not only for the Prince, but for everyone there. Certain it was, in any case, that no one talked any longer of Daniyal’s producing — even in the strictest privacy — the scurrilous parts of his play. And when some of the audacious spirits who had egged him on disappeared from the Camp, their departure was made the subject of lurid conjecture. Not but that other ways were to be found of explaining these disappearances, and of accounting, in general, for the crop of rumours that had sprung up. The amount of money that Daniyal was dissipating day by day reached an enormous sum. And inevitably; for this luxurious community, luxuriously entertained in a remote corner of the hills, was of necessity very expensive to

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support. From whom did Daniyal obtain the required funds? Certainly not from his father. And if from his young followers, how long would their complaisance, or their purses, bear the strain? How long could the process go on before they were all ruined, or before the scandal burst before the throne of Akbar himself? Gunevati was proud to declare that never a week went by without the suicide of some princeling, whose fortune had passed into Daniyal's pockets either at the gaming table or in some more mysterious and less reputable manner. Thus did it please *her* to account for the gaps among Daniyal's friends; and, if Mansur would smile and shrug at words such as these, even he — complacently cynical, as he was — confessed to a considerable uncertainty regarding the future. It was generally felt that Daniyal's prolonged absence from Court must be telling unfavourably against him; no doubt he was hoping to make up (in the Emperor's esteem at least) for his lack of interest in public affairs by advertising a great enthusiasm for the New Religion. According to Mansur, in his letters to his father, he represented the Camp as constructed primarily as a sort of Holy City or Mecca for pilgrims of the Din Ilahi, and in the same spirit he described his theatre as a temple of the new faith. But it was unlikely that these distortions of the truth would serve for long; there were not a few who considered that Daniyal was over-reaching himself, and predicted that sooner or later the Camp would provide his enemies with a powerful weapon against him. Jali listened and tried to give these things their due importance, but actually they did little more than supply a colourable background to his own personal intimations of insecurity; they suggested that not for himself alone, nor for Gunevati alone, but for everyone, some important change was impending.

He felt this at home, too, as if not even here was the course of life to continue as before. In one respect conditions were already slightly different. A week ago a spell of inclement weather had caused Gokal to abandon his tents and take up residence in the house. This had brought the two into one another's company again; and the discomfort that Jali now felt in Gokal's presence forced him to recognize that he was suffering from a sense of guilt. Once or twice the Brahmin had looked at him with a question in his eyes, and Jali had been constrained to turn his face away. It argued, indeed, no great delicacy of conscience in him that he should be feeling this self-disgust. To himself he frankly admitted it. First of all, he had

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given up Gokal's society in order to spend his time with Ali; then (taking a step from the ridiculous into the ignoble) he had resumed a kind of friendship with the very person who had done Gokal cruel harm. No wonder he could not go straight from the one to the other without a sense of shame.

AND then an incident took place that gave shape to his vague disquiet.

One evening, not long after he had gone to bed, the sound of oars on the lake caused him to sit up in astonishment; and a little later he distinctly heard a boat bump against the landing-stage at the bottom of the garden. In the dark he got up and went to the window to look out. His father had been sitting on a seat underneath; and now he saw him rise and move slowly down the path to the lake. In the direction of the landing-stage a lantern-light was visible through the trees; and presently this light began to move up towards the house. It was not long before he heard his father's voice raised in the greeting of some visitor, and at that his heart began to beat faster, for there was nowhere anybody could come from excepting the Camp. After a few minutes his father reappeared in the company of an old gentleman, whose head was wrapped up in a white shawl. Moving in a leisurely fashion, the two went indoors, and a moment later he heard voices in the guest-chamber which was beneath his own room. By leaning right out of the window he was able to catch a few sentences now and again, enough to inform him that the old gentleman was Shaik Mobarek, and that he had come over from the Camp. What did this visit portend? It wasn't as if his father and Mobarek had ever been very great friends — although his father, he remembered, used always to speak of the Shaik with a good deal of respect.

For several minutes he strained his ears; but most of the conversation escaped him. Then, all at once, he heard his own name pronounced — or was it Ali's? They were talking about Ali or Jali — he could not make out which. This brought him to an immediate decision. He made his way stealthily down the stairs and out into the garden. His mother, he knew, had already gone to bed; there was nothing to prevent him from standing outside the open window and eavesdropping.

To his surprise the voices had now ceased, but presently a rustling sound suggested an explanation: Mobarek, he imagined, had brought some papers, which his father was now reading. After a minute he heard a short, dry laugh. 'She has plenty of excuses — or

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reasons — for having sent Ali there, but I doubt whether they will carry much weight with Hari. Did you say that Ali is now being called back?’

‘Yes, he will be leaving the Pleasance within the next few days.’

‘I hope he will be gone before Hari returns.’

‘My dear Rajah, so far you have read only a part of Ambissa Begum’s letter. Please go on with it. I know what it contains, for she has been very open with me.’

After this, for a minute or two, there was complete silence, then the Rajah said: ‘Really, she has been presuming too much upon your patience, your good nature.’

‘Certainly not, my dear Rajah, certainly not!’ She felt that she could rely on my discretion, and naturally I feel honoured.’

‘But this’ — and the Rajah’s fingers could be heard tapping the letter — ‘this deals largely with my affairs.’

‘I know. And I therefore run the risk of appearing intrusive. However . . .’ The speaker went on talking for some time, but Jali could not make out what he was saying.

Feeling stiff and cramped, he now moved away, but presently curiosity brought him back to the window again, and for a moment he ventured to peep in.

His father was standing by the table. ‘Can I give you a little more sherbet — or some fruit?’

‘Sherbet, please.’ The Shaik paused to take a few sips. ‘Rajah, I am afraid there is something on your mind.’

‘Only this: it is quite plain that my sister wishes me to commit myself.’

Mobarek laughed airily. ‘On the contrary, what Ambissa has asked me to do is to persuade you that in the eyes of the world you have been — and still are — committing yourself.’

‘How?’

‘My dear Rajah, I know, and she knows, that it is a mere accident that you and the Prince are here together as neighbours in this remote spot, but the world does not understand that. At a time when everyone is taking sides with either Salim or Daniyal, you are *here*. People will regard that as significant.’

‘I think you exaggerate.’

‘What do I exaggerate? Rajah, you have now been out of the world for some months. You are ignorant of the actual state of affairs. Please take it from me that a man in your position cannot stand aloof.’

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There was a note of hesitation in Amar's voice as he replied: 'I have no wish to disassociate myself publicly from Prince Daniyal — especially if that implies sympathy with his brother.'

Mobarek gave a gentle little laugh. 'Rajah — tell me frankly! — have you never been conscious of any awkwardness in your position here? Have you never found it embarrassing to be living close to the Prince and yet avoiding nearer acquaintance?'

The Rajah was silent.

'It is not as if you and he had had an easy start either,' Mobarek went on with gentle persistence. 'I am referring to that trouble between the Prince and Hari Khan, when you were called in to act as go-between.'

'I hope that my attitude on that occasion . . .'

'No, no! Daniyal is far from feeling unfriendly; I am only wondering whether he has not been suspicious of unfriendliness in you.' The old man paused, then added suddenly: 'Did you know that Mabun Das was on his way here?'

'No.'

'Didn't you? He will be here in a week or less. All things considered, I can't help regarding it as unfortunate that Hari Khan should once again be living under your roof. Gokal, too, is a person whom the Prince has no reason to regard with great favour.'

After a moment's silence Amar said: 'What has Gokal done to incur the Prince's displeasure?'

'Well, I think he can hardly help feeling that Gokal's attitude to the Din Ilahi is not very flattering — either to himself or to the Emperor. Then, too, Gokal's influence with the Emperor has been considerable in the past, and I think Daniyal feels that Gokal has never used it to bring father and son to a better understanding of one another.'

To this the Rajah made no answer.

'Yesterday,' Mobarek went on, 'I heard something that will, I am afraid, cause you a good deal of concern. Gokal's recent indiscretion — you know what I am referring to — is not so safely hidden from the world as — as he perhaps imagines. Daniyal has knowledge of it.'

Amar's reply was a little delayed, but his voice, when it came, was even enough. 'I am sorry to hear this. Do you suppose that others besides the Prince . . .'



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'No. Daniyal was speaking to me in strict confidence. I think you can rely on his discretion.'

There was a long silence, and the sound of Mobarek's voice, when he next spoke, showed that he had risen and gone over to where Amar was standing. 'I want you to believe that I am going to use all my influence with Daniyal in Gokal's favour. — And now, my dear Rajah, I ought to be taking my leave. But I hope you will pay me a visit on the other side of the water before long. To-morrow the Prince should be starting on his journey to Kathiapur to meet Princess Lalita. Will you come the day after?'

It was to be heard that the speakers were now moving in the direction of the door. Two or three minutes later they appeared in the porch in front of the house. 'Oh yes,' Mobarek was saying, 'your sister and Lalita have become great friends; and, seeing that poor Lalita was already rather over-tired, Ambissa thought it might be a good plan. Life at the Pleasance is not exactly réstful, you know. Daniyal's vitality is inexhaustible.'

'I much regret that it cannot be managed,' Amar replied quietly. 'My father is a very old man, and I must tell you that since my mother's death — which took place only two months ago — he has been wandering in his mind.' While speaking the Rajah was closely watching Mobarek's face. 'Without a doubt,' he went on, 'Ambissa has failed to realize how matters stand. And that must be largely my own fault. In my anxiety not to distress her overmuch, I may have disguised the truth. Anyhow, circumstances make it impossible for me to offer the Princess hospitality, much as I should . . .'

'Of course, of course!' broke in Mobarek in a tone of warm understanding. 'Are you going to accompany me down to the lake, Rajah? That is very kind of you. Now let me see . . .'

The rest of the sentence was lost to Jali, although the old man's voice continued to reach him for some time.

After the two had gone, he came out from his hiding place, and stood looking at the lights that were again moving here and there on the little pier. The upper windows of the house behind him were dark, but the idea came into his head that someone might be watching him all the same. He turned and crept quietly up to his room.

HE got into bed and there lay still, staring into the dark with wide, excited eyes. The strain of the last hour had been great, and now he felt tired, but able to enjoy a sense of relaxation, and the refreshment that follows a period of complete engrossment. First of all his mind went back to the news of Ali's near departure. That had given him a great surprise, and he smiled as he recalled how terrified he had been lest his own name should be pronounced next. The thought that Ali was to leave the Camp caused him deep satisfaction, not only because he was afraid lest Ali should do him some bad turn, but also because his complicity with Ali had never ceased to be a source of discomfort to him. Surely he could now regard himself as having done with Ali for ever? And with regard to Gunevati, surely he would be able to say the same thing as soon as Mabun Das arrived? These reflections were very comforting. Moreover, the effect of the conversation as a whole had been to show him that the small field of his secret anxieties was not cut off from the rest of the world, as he was given to imagine, but existed as part of a much larger situation — a situation in which such important personages as his father, Shaik Mobarek, and Mabun Das took their place.

It was on these thoughts that he dropped off to sleep. The less agreeable features of his newly enlarged horizon had not yet claimed his attention; if he managed to put off thinking about Gokal, that was due partly to the composure with which his father had received Mobarek's disclosure, and partly to the fact that the danger threatening Gokal was not immediate, nor one that he could visualize clearly.

So he went to sleep undisturbed, but the frame of mind in which he awoke the next morning showed that his brain had in reality taken other aspects of the case. The excitement of the night had all evaporated, leaving him with a mind illuminated by very cold, grey light. For a time he lay quietly in bed, while the sounds of the house came to him familiarly, announcing the routine of the day. He could hear his father taking his usual turn on the terrace, his mother going over to the apartments of the old Rajah to see how he had passed the night, and the servants pattering about at their various tasks. Certain sounds from Gokal's wing reminded him

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that the Brahmin had decided, with the return of good weather, to give up his present quarters and go back to his tents.

It suddenly struck him that for the many weeks he had been living in this house he had been singularly unmindful of the thoughts and feelings of those around him. Day by day he had seen his father pace the terrace, and then withdraw into his private room, there to spend long hours alone — but not once had he been moved to speculate regarding what was going on in that mind. Day by day he had seen Gokal reclining on his couch, but he had merely glanced and turned away; he had never even fairly envisaged the question whether Gokal was moving towards health or the grave. Day by day he had been in the company of his mother, and into some dim region of his consciousness there had filtered the perception that she and Hari were undoubtedly in love. But what that meant to her (or to Hari) he had never concerned himself to imagine. This was the way his mind worked; and yet he was always ready to be astonished at the 'unseeingness' of others. It was true that his father seemed to him just now quite unusually imperceptive in failing to see that his mother and Hari loved one another; but wasn't he, possibly, just as blind to something of equally vital import to himself?

At this he paused, deeply considering; and then again something struck him. In regard to Gunevati he had been strangely obtuse. Little as he could understand her so-called love for Daniyal, he might have realized before now that it would vastly intensify her chagrin at not becoming a better actress. Being unable — owing to Daniyal's indifference to women — to make effective use of her customary wiles, she must have struggled hard to improve herself. And when her want of success became apparent, how could it have failed to occur to her that she could, if only she dared, draw his attention upon herself in quite another way?

The question this bore upon was of course that of Gokal's betrayal. Had the Prince obtained his information from his spies or from Gunevati herself? The first seemed the likeliest conjecture, but it was also possible that not even her fear of Mabun Das, not even 'the warnings' had sufficed to keep Gunevati from using her tongue. Yes, the betrayal of Gokal might well have been her work, her first step on a very dangerous path. She might, Jali conceived, have argued that Mabun Das did not interest himself particularly in Gokal, whereas Daniyal, on the other hand, would be vastly

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amused to find that he was in a position to blackmail so eminent and respected a personage. Daniyal's delight in scandal was noteworthy even in the Camp where scandalmongering was the principal pastime. The Prince spent a great deal of his time in the theatre; he was in the habit of strolling about the stage during rehearsals, and not infrequently he would chat with anyone who happened to be in the wings. There were days when Gunevati would come out of the theatre, radiant, to boast that Daniyal had stood talking to her for at least five minutes.

Jali's thoughts had now narrowed themselves down to a definite problem, but he deliberately put it aside in order to return to a consideration of his father and Mobarek. It would be a mistake, he felt sure, to write Mobarek down as nothing more than a crafty old statesman with schemes in his head, which his father was reluctant to support. His father, he knew, had a real respect for Mobarek in spite of the latter's allegiance to Daniyal. Here was a very interesting problem: Mobarek tolerated Daniyal, and his father tolerated Mobarek; indeed, his father's attitude suggested that he himself might be persuaded to tolerate Daniyal in time.

A little later, Jali took a solitary walk by the lakeside. He was feeling exceedingly puzzled. Was it possible that Daniyal and his friends were different from what he thought them? Did they possess compensating virtues that he was unable to see? Or, assuming that Daniyal was indeed what he thought him, was it necessary to look upon such a character as vile? Weren't all people very much alike when you got to know them? Wasn't it rather naive to consider some people very good and others very wicked? Was he, Jali, competent to judge of the pleasantness or unpleasantness of other people? When he came to examine his own character, it certainly did not strike him as particularly pleasant.

There was some comfort in the thought that he himself might be almost as odious as Daniyal, because then he would not be so hopelessly out of place in the world, nor suffering misery that was undeserved. On the other hand, the world did certainly contain *some* unquestionably nice people. He came back to that with a conviction that was unshakable. His father and mother, Hari and Gokal — they *were* superior to the inmates of the Camp. And what about their position?

It suddenly came over him with impassioned feeling that nothing else mattered so much. He had reason to believe — everything was

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still leading him to believe — that nice people were exceedingly scarce. Was the world made up of people like those he had seen at Agra and people like Daniyal and his crew? If that was the case, if 'nice people' constituted only a handful — a poor, ineffective, inarticulate handful — then nothing was left but despair. Here, here, he realized, was the core of his present unhappiness. And comparing himself as he now was with what he had been at Khanjo, it seemed to him that his present unhappiness, if less violent, nevertheless threatened to penetrate far deeper. The cloud that had enveloped him at Khanjo had been local and temporary: his present gloom threatened to stretch in a darkening pall over the whole of his life.

In the afternoon he went down to the boat-house. The weather had turned dull and heavy, so that he had to order his boatmen to bring out a rowing-boat.

They rowed with a sluggishness that was due partly to the languor of the day, and partly due to their unwillingness to take him to the Camp; for they were beginning to be afraid that their young master's increasing recklessness would lead to his being found out, and that a part of Rajah Amar's wrath might be visited on them. Jali sat in the stern with a set face and absent gaze. He was thinking hard. How was he to extract from Gunevati what he wanted to know? He felt that he must set about his task with great caution, for it was possible — quite possible — that Daniyal had *not* obtained his information about Gokal from her, and that she was not yet even aware that the Prince had been told. Of course Daniyal was sure to question her on the subject sooner or later, but, if he delayed until after Mabun Das's arrival, the danger would be greatly reduced; for then Gunevati would certainly not dare to be indiscreet. The critical period was *now*, and danger would continue until Daniyal left the Camp.

What he feared more than anything else was that she would yield to the temptation to talk about Hari. The fact that the Prince was on the point of setting out to meet Princess Lalita and bring her back to the Camp might just tip the scale. Gunevati knew well enough in what spirit Daniyal would receive the news that Lalita had not scrupled to carry on an intrigue with Hari even after her official betrothal. He would be delighted; it would amuse him immensely; he would laugh. How should he not laugh upon suddenly finding himself able to evade a marriage for which he had always been disinclined? How amusing for him to be in a position

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to disconcert the Emperor, create a tremendous scandal in the Imperial Court, and bring shame and disaster upon Hari and the Princess.

Under the stimulus of this anxiety, Jali racked his brains to find a scheme for getting Gunevati to reveal herself. In the event of his failing (which was only too likely), he might, he reflected, have recourse to Mansur. From Mansur it might be possible to find out at least whether she and Daniyal had been seen talking together more than usual of late; if Mansur was in a position to expose or betray Gunevati in any way, he would probably enjoy doing so; everybody in the Camp was always ready to do a friend a bad turn. Only he mustn't appear too much in earnest, for neither would Mansur be desirous of doing *him* a good turn.

His boat was now nearing the opposite shore; already he caught a whiff of the aromatic gums and incense that were being burnt in braziers here and there about the Camp. This was done in an attempt to mask the smell of the polluted marsh, which was becoming more unpleasant every day. A canopy of sweet-smelling smoke hung over the gabled and domed roofs, framing the Camp from above — just as the grey water framed it from below. Jali eyed the approaching façade with loathing; each jerk of the oars that was bringing him nearer tightened the oppression of his heart. Upon reaching the landing-stage he noticed that the lake-front was deserted, and as he stepped out he remembered that this was the day fixed for a spectacle of unusual interest in the open-air arena at the back of the Camp. For a few moments he stood still, grinding his teeth with annoyance; Gunevati, who never missed any festive occasion, was sure to be there; nor was she likely to come away so long as any part of the entertainment remained to be seen.

For nearly an hour he wandered forlornly round and about, and during most of this time was lost in a deep abstraction. From the depths of one of his reveries he awoke to find himself halting before a large brazier that was sending up a dense, brown column of smoke to thicken the pall overhead. Over this brazier stood one of the negroes that Daniyal had imported into the Camp, a man of great stature and girth, jet-black, and possessed of a countenance that fascinated Jali by reason of its immense animal gusto. The negro was poking the charcoal with an iron bar, and when a glowing coal of any size fell through the grid he would pick it up and play with it, tossing it high into the air and catching it again. Out of a doorway

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near-by there stepped a young girl whose extravagantly painted face and bizarre dress showed her to be prepared for the stage. As she came running past, with flashing teeth and glinting eyes and a joggle of her full breasts, the negro reached out an arm like a gorilla's, and caught her half-naked body against his own glistening flesh. For a moment she hung suspended in his clasp; but he forgot that he was holding a live coal in the other hand, and a second later with a howl he dropped coal and girl together, to hop up and down on his toes, his head thrown back in a grin of mingled amusement and pain. With shrieks of laughter the girl ran on.

Roused from his preoccupation, Jali made the sudden decision that he would go to the house where Gunevati was lodged and wait for her there. Up to this time he had avoided visiting her in her own quarters, but a certain curiosity to see them now seized him, and he had grown weary of wandering about the streets. As he went along there came into his mind a memory of the night when he had ransacked her room at Khanjo. That had been a terrible period in his life; he had often assured himself that he would never suffer so much again; but now he was not so sure. When he came to the house he found an Arab doorkeeper squatting before the entrance. It was a large building in which the Prince lodged a considerable number of the entertainers in his employ. Jali had heard talk of this Arab, who was given out to be a eunuch; everyone said that for a small bribe he would admit anyone. This report proved true enough; and the next minute, following the man's directions, he was proceeding down a long, empty corridor. Some of the doors he passed stood open; but although the whole house was seemingly deserted, he went by them with hurried, furtive tread. It was not only the leer of the doorkeeper that made him shamefaced; the feelings that had hitherto kept him away from this place, now returned in strength, giving him a sense of being engaged upon a squalid and dangerous errand. The door of the room which he took to be Gunevati's was shut, but, fearing to find himself mistaken, he stood outside listening, and a minute elapsed before he could muster up courage to raise the latch. On his first view of the room, he was surprised by its size and the elegance of its appointments. It was in half-light, produced by screens of fretted cedar over the main window; spreading branches of Persian lilac and roses and sprays of jasmine stood in the corners; and the furniture was of old Kashmiri make. It occurred to him that this apartment must have

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been assigned to Gunevati soon after her arrival, in the days when she was winning easy triumphs in the voiceless role of Lakshmi. The next thing that caught his attention was an enormous pile of water-lilies in the middle of the room. The heap was so big that it spread over nearly the whole floor, and the sweet, but muddy, smell of the blossoms was overpowering. This smell had always been very unpleasant to him, and now the scent of the thick white flowers was mixed with the still muddier smell of the wet stalks and leaves. It made an atmosphere that seemed to him almost unbreathable. He was on the point of retreating when the couch at the other end of the room gave a sudden creak, and someone who had been lying down sat up to look who had come in. To his satisfaction he saw that it was actually Gunevati.



THE look of pleasure that came into his face was completely unfeigned, so nearly had he given up hope of seeing her that day. He kept this pleased expression as he advanced across the room; smiling shyly, he was conscious of the hypocrisy of his smile. Gunevati looked as if she had been crying, but instead of alluding to that, he asked if she was ill. She had a headache, she told him; she and her friends had been out on the lake all the morning, bathing and picking water-lilies, and the sun had been too much for her. 'How did you know you would find me here?' she asked.

'I didn't know. I thought you must be at the Circus. But I got tired of wandering about the Camp, so I decided to come here and wait for you.'

She was eyeing him with a certain curiosity. Sitting up a little, she arranged the cushions behind her head; the thin, yellow silk of her robe left her neck and arms bare; her hair hung in two braids over her shoulders. Seeing that she had left the foot of the couch free for him, he sat himself down on it.

Her manner of looking at him increased his self-consciousness; turning his head about, he examined the room with a pretended interest. Amusement seemed to gather behind her eyes as they continued to rest upon him, and he suddenly guessed in what fashion she was interpreting his shyness.

'Did I wake you up?' he asked.

'Yes. But it doesn't matter. What did you want to talk to me about?'

He had his answer ready, but he kept it back. He explained that he had forgotten this was a great day at the Circus, and asked what was going on there.

'But what made you come to my room?' she persisted.

He pretended to hesitate. 'Well, as I was walking about, I suddenly realized that I was just outside your door.'

She laughed gently.

Again for a moment he gave himself the appearance of hesitating, then in lowered tones he said: 'I also saw *the sign* written in the dust just outside.'

This lie, he fancied, was quite a useful one: whilst accounting, in

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some sort, for his visit, it also turned the conversation in the direction he desired. He had the satisfaction of seeing Gunevati frown.

'Did Ahmed notice it?' she asked.

'Ahmed?'

'The doorkeeper.'

'No, I don't think he could have noticed it. He seemed to be half-asleep. I rubbed it out with my foot as I came in.'

He knew her to be very sensitive about the sign, which she seemed to regard as a disgrace. While he studied her surreptitiously, a sudden wave of self-disgust swept over him. How tired he was of deceptions and trickeries! Whether at home or at the Camp, he was always acting a part. His true self seemed to be incapable of honest relationships: it was condemned by some deep defect of nature to everlasting treachery.

After a moment she stretched out her arms and gave a yawn that was also half a sigh. 'Hand me that mirror, will you?' And she began examining herself.

A little disappointed, he went off on another tack. 'I had a piece of news yesterday. Just as I was leaving the Camp someone told me that Ali was going away. Is it true?'

'Yes, he is going.' She spoke absently; she was applying some kohl to her eyelashes.

'Really going?' Jali leant forward with exaggerated eagerness. 'But why? Is the Prince sending him away?'

Gunevati continued to study her reflection in the glass. 'Oh, his mother wanted him, I suppose. But he'll come back. That affair is not over yet, my dear. We shall have our Ali back again before very long.' She spoke distraitly; she was without the interest in Ali that she had once had.

Half to himself Jali murmured: 'The smell of your water-lilies makes me feel quite sick,' and closing his eyes, he leaned back against the wall at the foot of the couch. Beneath the surface his sense of strain and discomfort was great, but he was bent upon giving himself a natural, peaceful air. A sudden vision came to him of Gunevati sporting naked on the lily-lea with her friends. He could imagine the shrieks, the laughter, the splashing, the ruthless tearing at the long slimy stalks and the tossing of the booty on to the bank. The shallows must have become quite turbid before the naked, panting, muddled girls had thrown themselves down on the grass under the sun. How enviable to be like Gunevati, to hold but one

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thing before your mind at a time, to be hungry and eat, sleepy and sleep, to be laughing and screaming one moment, and then to come back and indulge in a fit of tears. What did tears matter? They would soon be over, and then one was ready for the next thing. No overlapping, no inward confusion or conflict.

Presently she embarked upon a theme which, he knew, might well occupy her for an hour on end. It was the story of her relations with Jagashri Rane, the earlier chapters of which he had already listened to often before. At the time when she was at the height of her glory (her glory, poor thing, being in reality, merely that of having been a 'discovery' of Daniyal's), the Rane had made advances to her in the most overt fashion, her object evidently being to advertise 'an affair'. Gunevati had felt flattered, and although it was not long before she realized that the Rane was merely seeking notoriety, she saw no reason to reject the offered liaison. If it would help to make the Rane interesting in the Prince's eyes, it would do the same thing for her. Her feelings for Jagashri at this time were not unfriendly; whilst she looked down upon her somewhat for not being a true Lesbian, she could not but admire the determined way in which she pretended to be one. When Jali had expressed his surprise at finding Jagashri in the Camp, she had told him that at Agra the Rane, in her anxiety to attract Daniyal's favourable notice, had bribed a lady who was well established in his coterie to flaunt an amour with her before the Prince's eyes. It was accordingly certain that Gunevati was no dupe, but that did not prevent her from being furious when Jagashri dropped her — as she presently did — on the first signs of her falling out of fashion. All this was an old story; what Gunevati now had to recount was a prospect of successful revenge. Jagashri, she averred, had been taking her pleasure with a male lover in the Camp all the time; and this man had betrayed her to Mansur, who in turn had passed the news on to *her*. Well; she had at once set about seducing Jagashri's lover, and had succeeded so well (at least so she said) that he was now ready to blackmail Jagashri, who had had the folly to send him love-letters, which, if circulated, would make her the laughing-stock of the Camp.

Jali pretended to be listening and to be amused, but in truth he hardly took in a word of what Gunevati was saying. He had heard too many stories of this kind before; his mind was far away; he doubted whether Gunevati was telling the truth. All her story did

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was to awaken a faint flicker of pity in his heart, for he saw in her virulent hatred of Jagashri a measure of her consciousness of her own decline and failure.

When she had finished, she lay back, her hands clasped behind her head, and there followed a silence in which she seemed to sink into her former listlessness. Jali felt far from listless. The silence oppressed him; it reigned not only in this room, but over the whole neighbourhood, and the faint sounds of cheering that floated in through the window were embarrassing, for they drew attention to the gaieties in which Gunevati was taking no part. Not until this moment had he asked himself with sufficient seriousness what it meant that she should be shutting herself up here in this room by herself. Was she merely indulging in a fit of childish petulance, or had she been so slighted that she dared not show her face in public?

As he watched her, a new detail caught his attention. Although her eyes were half-closed and her attitude appeared to be one of relaxation, her foot, which was hanging down from the couch, had a rapid, nervous movement. This observation wrought upon him most singularly. His mind, which had been in a state of tension, was now also caught up in an agonizing suspense. His physical discomfort, too, caused by the scent of the lilies, was turning into a languor akin to faintness. He looked with longing at a small window at the other end of the room, the only one that was without a screen. What did these white flowers, what did this languor, remind him of? Something that had happened long ago; something that was now happening all over again. But how could things happen over again? And what was it that he remembered? Ah, yes! it was the blossoms of the temple-trees upon the sacred mound. . . . But that had been a delight, and this was a kind of torment.

Although he refrained from looking at Gunevati he knew that her eyes were upon him. She was looking at him fixedly, and behind her eyes there was a smile. He heard her move; she was swinging herself into a sitting position. She came and sat close beside him on the edge of the couch. A curious passivity held him motionless; he remained looking straight before him, while Gunevati's laughing eyes and laughing mouth came closer and closer to his face. Then suddenly her arms were upon his shoulders; the weight of her body threw him backwards, and she was lying on him, her lips pressed against his. Almost at once he began to struggle; and with so much

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real determination that in another moment he was on his feet. Trembling, bathed in sweat, he stood by the couch and looked down at her. There she lay, upon her back, laughing. She lay with her feet trailing on the ground, her arms outspread, her whole body indolently relaxed. He stood looking down at the lovely curves of her upturned chin, her throat, and her breasts. Her laughter was so full of insult that the blood rushed to his head; he turned and walked round the heap of water-lilies to the open window.

The air felt fresh, and it quickly restored him. Outside was a little grass-covered court, shaded by two or three birches. From tree to tree there hung a clothes-line covered with gay muslins. The scene looked pleasant, until he noticed two rats nosing in a heap of garbage in one corner.

His mind was now working again with complete lucidity. 'I mustn't let this interfere,' he thought. 'I must keep my object steadily before me. I shall have to be tactful for a while; for she must not feel offended.' He had little doubt that he understood her; but that again must not be allowed to appear. He mustn't give signs of guessing how hopeless and humiliated she felt. He must behave boyishly; he must appear embarrassed, angry. He must let her laugh at him; it would not be difficult.

He waited. But no sound came from the dusky room behind him, and presently he felt that a catastrophe might be brewing in the silence at his back. Intently he listened; he could hear nothing but the buzzing of a blue-bottle that had been attracted by the smell of the water-lilies.

'Jali!' Her voice, when it came, was full of mockery. 'What are you doing over there? Come back! I want to talk to you.'

His face cleared, but, quickly remembering his part, 'What do you want?' he said surlily.

'Come here!'

'I can't bear the smell of your water-lilies. They make me feel sick.'

'Nonsense!' She was laughing. 'I want to talk to you.'

'What about?'

'Tell me, my jewel! Does your Brahmin know that I am here?' .

This was the first mention of Gokal that had passed her lips since their dreadful parting at Khanjo. Jali's heart began to thump against his ribs; he remained facing the window.

'No. I think not,' he replied after a silence.

'Why don't you tell him?'

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'Why should I?'

'Because it might interest him to hear it.'

He made no answer.

'You are afraid that he still loves me,' she mocked.

Jali's lips moved to curse her silently. 'No,' he said after a moment; 'Gokal doesn't think about you at all.'

She gave a little laugh and murmured something that he failed to catch. Turning, he saw that she was sitting up against a pile of cushions in her former place. He went back across the room and took his seat once more at the foot of the couch.

Again a dreadful silence, a nerve-racking silence, settled down upon them. Moving impatiently from one flower to another, the blue-bottle buzzed loudly by fits and starts. The cheering from the Circus had stopped, but all at once there came through the open window a distant, deep-toned roar. So deep was it, so vibrant, that, although very faint, the sense of power it conveyed was extraordinary. Gunevati drew a long breath. 'That is one of the Prince's lions,' she said. 'Have you seen them? They were fetched all the way from Africa.'

Jali made no reply. He was still leaning back against the wall, with an absent gaze fixed upon the water-lilies, and all at once he found himself looking into a tiny eye that was staring straight into his. At first he thought it was a snake, but suddenly the creature gave a sharp movement which showed it to be a large newt. The scent of the lilies was again sending him into a lethargy, and again he felt as if Time were halting in its course. He thought of those moments when, in the terrific blaze of noon, he had watched Gunevati idling beside the little temple in the wood. Now, as then, he felt the Present expand, and stagnate, and reflect everlastingness; only there was no foretaste of beatitude in this experience; it was rather an initiation into a state of living death. In this standstill of Time something seemed to be maturing, but with a slowness that gave every moment the value of eternity.

Thus strangely stricken he sat there, until once more Gunevati's foot attracted his attention. He felt that she was going to speak.

'You have no idea how the Prince laughed when I told him about Gokal.'

'You told him about Gokal?'

'I did.'

'What did you tell him?'

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'Everything.'

'You told him, then, how you . . .'

She sneered. 'It was just that that amused him so much.'

Jali made no answer. A deathly calm spread over him. Between this and instant murder there was no middle way. Besides he wanted to hear more.

'I knew you had told the Prince,' he said after a pause.

'Oh!' She showed some surprise. 'How did you know that?'

'Shaik Mobarek visited my father yesterday evening. I heard them having a long talk together.'

She kept her eyes fixed upon him; she was slightly disconcerted, he thought; though whether by this piece of news, or by his equanimity, he could not tell.

'Did they talk about me?' she asked.

'No. At least your name was not actually mentioned.'

'What did they talk about?'

'Many things. But why should I tell you, when . . .'

 He broke off. 'You had better be careful,' he added.

She was gazing at him hard; her foot now had a very rapid swing. 'What do you mean?' she said.

'Well — in the first place, I was thinking of something Mansur said not long ago.'

'What was that?'

'He thought that you had been growing rather reckless lately.'

'Reckless?'

'With your tongue.'

A sharp cry of anger escaped her. 'What nonsense! And what does Mansur know about it? Besides, as for Gokal, what does Mabun Das care about *him*?'

Jali paused for a moment, then he said: 'Mabun Das is coming. Did you know?'

'Yes. I know.'

'And Mabun Das is very friendly with Hari Khan. Had you forgotten?'

She stared back at him, frowning. 'Forgotten? No. But what has that got to do with it?'

He kept silent.

'We are talking about Gokal,' she continued scornfully. 'And Mabun Das cares nothing about *him*. He isn't in love with the old fool, like you.'

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‘No. But with regard to Hari Khan. . . .’

‘Hari Khan!’ she cried in a voice shrill with exasperation. ‘Why do you drag Hari Khan in? He has nothing to do with it.’

At these words Jali felt satisfied, and rejoiced in profound thankfulness. Looking calmly into her eyes he replied: ‘What I mean is that Hari Khan is very fond of Gokal. He has been feeling angry with you already, and he will be angrier still if he hears that you have been talking.’

Gunevati’s face actually suggested that she had overlooked this. There was a silence during which she seemed to be wrestling with her emotions. ‘I am not afraid of Hari Khan!’ she pronounced at last with great passion.

Jali determined to add one more stroke. ‘It seems to me that the sign of warning has been coming to you more often of late. Isn’t that because *they* know that you have become reckless? Almost anyone can see you — and perhaps even overhear you — as you stand there in the wings talking to the Prince.’

Gunevati’s nostrils twitched and her eyes flashed; then she sprang from the couch and stood over Jali, as if longing to do him physical injury. He looked up into her face curiously. It was strange to see features which, in their soft and subtle delicacy seemed designed to express only the gentleness of love, actually illustrating an extreme of hate and fear.

‘I curse the Brahmin!’ she cried. ‘An old fat man, a fool — he should have died the death of a pig! What does Mabun Das care about him? Why should he listen to Hari Khan? He has plenty of other things to attend to. And as for the Prince — he laughed, I tell you! The Prince laughed!’

Having spoken, she made a sudden turn, went to a small cabinet, and drew from it a bundle which she flung at Jali’s feet. ‘These are the only things of his that I have not sold — rubbish! I give him back his rubbish and spit in his face. Take these things to him and tell him that from me!’

Jali had risen from his place, and now he bent down automatically to pick up the bundle. It was the dress that Gunevati had habitually worn at Khanjo, and he noticed that some cheap bracelets were threaded on to the piece of string that tied it up.

His brain was now dull, his senses all deadened. This is the end! he thought; and as he looked into Gunevati’s rage-distorted countenance he wondered if she also felt that something decisive had taken



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place. For a minute they stood there facing one another; and then he saw that for her, too, this day and this moment were critical. Only it was not with Gokal, nor with Hari, nor even with Mabun Das, that she was primarily concerned; in the centre of her being stood the dazzling figure of the Prince; if she was contemplating her failure as an actress, her desertion by her friends, their ridicule, and her probable dismissal from the Camp — this was merely the outward shape of her great interior tragedy. Looking into her face — as he thought for the last time — it was borne in on him that she had neither the heart, nor the mind, nor the will, to escape her fate — whatever that might be. Her perversity and triviality were as stubborn and fateful as any of the virtues of wise and saintly men. There was no more to be said in the way of warning or appeal. He regarded her with an embarrassment into which there entered an element of awe. For while she stood for so little in herself, she represented so much in the world.

IN the afternoon of the next day he crossed the lake again, but instead of taking his boat to the Camp, he put in at a point two miles below it, and, after telling his boatmen to wait for him there, started off through the tangle of young birches and willows that clothed this part of the lake-shore. His object was to assure himself that the Prince had started on his journey, and this he proposed to do by making inquiries upon the road along which the Prince had to pass.

A few months ago this road had been nothing but a narrow track; it was now a well-trodden highway, provided with halting-places for the constant stream of porters that passed along it. Jali had about a mile of rough, boggy ground to cross, and it was with a peculiar mixture of nervous concentration and absent-mindedness that he picked his way along. He had slept little that night, and now was so tired that his thoughts drifted to the promptings of every chance association. For the moment he was thinking about the valley of Ravi, and taking comfort in the reflection that in a few months, or at most in a few years, it would return to its natural state. For Daniyal's Camp was certainly not permanent, and after its desertion the light wooden structures that composed it would very soon rot away. He could see them in his mind's eye, flimsy ruins without any beauty in their decay; in the end mosses and creepers would spread over everything, willows and alders would sprout up, the site would disappear completely.

In those days, he supposed, the Prince would be reigning as Emperor over the land; and, with a dozen country palaces at his disposal, why should he ever waste a thought upon the valley of Ravi? But it was wretched to picture Daniyal lording it over the whole of India! — wretched to think of him and his friends as wielding authority, setting the tone of society, and giving India its name among men. Even should he, Jali, choose to retire to his lovely valley and live as a hermit in his grandfather's house, he would still be a subject of Daniyal's. At these reflections his brow clouded, and he was astonished at the violence of the hatred he found in his heart.

In about twenty minutes he came out on to the road, and in-

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quired of a group squatting by the wayside whether the Prince had yet passed. It was not often that anything in the Camp took place in accordance with previous announcement, so he was somewhat surprised when the answer came in what seemed to be the affirmative. But it was doubtful whether these people had properly understood him, for they spoke in a dialect that he himself was hardly able to make out. Proceeding farther along the road in the direction of the Camp, he asked again. This time the answer came crisp and clear: the Prince had passed about an hour ago. Although greatly pleased by this news, he went on; he knew better than to consider the matter as put beyond all doubt. The next three persons that he met all assured him that the Prince had not yet started, and as one of his informants was a member of the Prince's own guard, he felt obliged to accept this intelligence as reliable. It was a disappointment, although far from unexpected. Gloomily he turned off the road, and, choosing a place out of sight of the passers-by, sat down to take counsel with himself. Although his disinclination to go forward into the Camp was very strong, the anxiety that pressed him on had an almost equal intensity. He knew that there would be no peace of mind for him so long as he had not done all that was possible to discover how matters stood. Whilst thus at conflict with himself, his gaze wandered over the mountain-slope down which he had first come into the valley of Ravi on his journey from Khanjo, and suddenly he became aware that a party of five men on horseback were descending by the same path. His mind turned at once to Hari: he seemed to remember that Hari had taken four men with him. Shading his eyes, he strove hard to identify the leading horseman; nor was it very long before he did actually convince himself that his surmise had been right.

Excitement stirred within him; whilst his gaze remained fixed upon that distant figure, his imagination was actively at work. He visualized Hari at Khanjo; he pictured him conducting his investigations; and, as one scene after another passed before his mind's eye, he saw in a flash that the only thing Hari was really likely to have discovered was what his, Jali's, relations with Gunavati had been. One of the villagers, if not Mujatta herself, would — almost certainly — have given him this information. The moment he thought of this it seemed to him as plain as anything could be, and he was staggered by his stupidity in not having seen it before.

In a kind of daze he began walking up and down. Here at last

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was the end of this dreadful period of his concealments and deceptions. Taxed with having carried on an intrigue with Gunevati, he would conceal no vestige of the truth. A grim satisfaction possessed him; much as he dreaded the ordeal that lay ahead he also welcomed it. His heart was beating hard as he watched Hari and his four horsemen coming down the slope. Their path would take them round the end of the lake without bringing them any nearer to the Camp, and, as the loop was a long one, a couple of hours must elapse before they would reach the old Rajah's house. Jali noted this with relief, for it gave him time to think.

The exultation that had seized upon him a moment ago was already beginning to evaporate. When he looked to see what it was built upon he could find nothing—nothing except a weak relief at having done with his concealments and responsibilities. The situation remained the same in every other respect. His confessions would do nothing to extricate Gokal from his difficulties, nor relieve Hari from the dangers that threatened him. Moreover, owing to the Prince's delay in starting, these dangers loomed up more imminent than ever.

A minute ago, in his first excitement, he had vaguely assumed that everything would now be cleared up and that his elders and betters would lose no time in putting matters right. But, to picture the future a little more closely, how far was he likely to succeed in conveying his meaning to persons whose minds were so unprepared and so different from his? To explain the bare facts of the case would be possible no doubt, but bare facts were often misleading; and when it came to communicating subtle shades of feeling, conjecture, and intuition, how hopeless the undertaking appeared! If, for a few instants, he had imagined himself putting an end to his spiritual isolation, that had been a very foolish dream. How could he ever explain what he had been in the old days, or what he had gone through, or what he had now become?

Nor did his discouragement stop here. Suddenly he discovered that his childish confidence in his elders had disappeared. Hitherto it had been an article of his faith that in all those matters where he himself was incompetent, they were of godlike capability. Something had recently happened to undermine that belief, so that now, when he thought of his father, Hari, and Gokal taking the situation in hand, he felt no pleasant glow of reassurance, but a sinking of the heart. Of himself he already despaired; his failure to foresee the

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almost infallible consequences of Hari's visit to Khanjo had destroyed his last hopes of ever being able to make an intelligent use of his intelligence. But his elders now appeared no better. In one respect they were even worse, for whereas he was aware of his stupidity, they were quite unaware of theirs.

In a sudden revulsion of feeling he stamped up and down the glade, whilst tears of rage and hopelessness streamed down his cheeks. He saw fools, fools everywhere! Nothing but fools! Look at Hari, coming back, smug and jaunty no doubt, from what he considered a very successful investigation! How hopelessly his cheerful self-conceit, his appetites, and his sentimentalities blinded him! Look at Rajah Amar! If his unawareness of his wife's feelings did not label him clearly enough, you had only to consider his life: not only had he been consistently humbugged by his dependants, not only was he continually deceived in his friends, not only was he quite ignorant of the true character and behaviour of his son, but he entirely failed to understand his own nature, and his moral code was merely a glorification of his own temperament. Look at Gokal, doting on a vile creature, who ridiculed him, and finally attempted to take his life! Was there anyone in the world who was not either odious, or a fool, or both? Mabun Das, might one say? No, him least of all. What was he but a poor little man who shut his eyes to the stars, concentrating the whole beam of his narrow intelligence upon the things at his feet, and yet, there he was, the person chiefly responsible for the disasters now impending!

Worn out at last by helpless rage, Jali threw himself on the ground and sullenly wiped the tears from his face. In a few moments he was calm enough to be taken with a certain surprise at the turn of his own feelings. Why this fury against his own people, in particular his own father? He swerved aside from the question, but not before observing that what rankled in his mind was the even tone in which his father habitually spoke about Daniyal and the Camp. His open-mindedness had vanished completely; he now knew that he hated Daniyal and his company with a hatred so violent that it would listen to no arguments on the other side. His rage against his father and Hari sprang from the knowledge that he would be unable to kindle in them a flame of hatred equal to his own. That really was what he had had in his mind when telling himself despairingly that he would be unable to 'explain'. His secret desire was to make use of his father and the others as instruments of his vengeance, to

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set them upon Daniyal like a host of avenging furies. This momentary glance into his own heart filled him with astonishment, and then he turned his thoughts away.

The time had come to make a move. His final decision was to go home, so as to be there when Hari arrived. Gloomily he got up and made his way back to the boat. There was little likelihood that Hari would say anything that day, but his looks and manner might, he thought, show him how the land lay. In any case, it would be better to put off going to the Camp until the evening, when Mansur and the other people he wanted to question would be more easy to find.

The night was warm, dark, and gusty. Little rapid waves slapped the sides of the boat as Jali set out, and the wind made progress slow. His thoughts were no longer concerned with Hari, who had given him no sign of what was in his mind; but in truth it mattered little how much Hari already knew, since he felt bound to make a full confession in any case. To guard against any weakening of his resolution, he acted upon a freakish impulse that had seized him only a few minutes ago. Before coming down to the boat, he had crept through the darkness to Gokal's tent and thrust Gunevati's dress and trinkets under the flap that hung over the entrance. His idea was that Gokal should find the things there when he woke in the morning.

Now, as his boat pushed its way through the moist wind and ruffled water, it was neither with Hari nor with Gokal that he was occupied. He had returned to the perplexed and feverish thoughts that had kept him awake through the previous night. Gunevati's image haunted him; her personality obsessed him; not for a moment since their last meeting had she been entirely out of his mind. At first he had tried to argue that she was insane. Had he been able to look upon her merely as a 'case', he could have denied her half her significance. But, comparing her with others in the Camp who were unquestionably unbalanced, prone to hysteria, or addicted to drink or drugs, he could find no points of resemblance. Mentally as well as physically Gunevati exhibited herself as sound; the evil in her was not a disease. Her nerves, too, were good; he could not help admitting that her nervous stability was far superior to his.

In the long hours of the night he had been quite unable to prevent his thoughts from flying up into regions of sheer wonder. He saw

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the girl under two aspects, the contrasts between which threw him into bewilderment. In the first she appeared as a creature both undeveloped and ill-developed, a being low in the scale of human worth: her second aspect showed her as one who had gone beyond him into a sphere where larger powers moved and issues were more dire. How came it that she seemed already to have fulfilled herself? whereas he still stood, vacillating and terrified, upon the threshold of life. Thinking of her body, so soft, so youthful — a body not more than two or three years older than his! — he was overawed by the ruthlessness of the forces by which she was carried along. In operation those forces were enormous and implacable; in essence they were trivial, haphazard, and unworthy of respect. For this reason he refused to dignify her infatuation with the name of love. Love! No, no, that would be to flatter her too much. Her infatuation might be all-important to her, it might have important consequences for others, but it remained a spurious and contemptible thing.

The lights of the Camp were dancing on the broken water as his boat drew near; the smell of the place and its everlasting music came to him with a familiarity that made him feel as if he had known it from the beginning of time. The force of his loathing was so intense that he fell into a fit of trembling. Was there nothing that anyone could do to bring destruction upon this nest of snakes?

Before landing, he braced himself for his task; chiefly he wanted to ascertain whether Gunevati had had any conversation with the Prince within the last twenty-four hours, and whether there was any likelihood of their meeting before the Prince made his start. This he hoped to find out from Mansur. To seek *her* out again was impossible. Wandering about along the lake-front, he began by making inquiries among the boatmen and others regarding the Prince's movements; but only to meet the usual evasive answers, which were prompted partly by ignorance and partly by an instinctive disinclination to be obliging. There was a good deal of stir in the streets, and many strange faces were to be seen; placards announced that the festivities were to open in six days. Keeping a sharp look out for Mansur or anybody else who might be of use, he made his way by a devious route towards Gunevati's house. It had occurred to him that Ahmed, the doorkeeper, was a person to question, and he had provided himself with plenty of money to induce the man to speak. Out of the door of the building, when he reached it, there

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was issuing a troupe of girls, evidently on their way to the theatre for a rehearsal. Lamps threw a strong light over the scene, and had Gunevati been amongst them, he could not have failed to see her. Until they had moved away he stood by a booth making purchases of sweetmeats and rice-spirit. The spirits might, he thought, be acceptable to Ahmed, whose scowling face showed that he was sober, and was finding that condition a very disagreeable one. Unable to muster up courage to accost the bevy of laughing girls, Jali gave himself the excuse that nothing they might have told him would have been worthy of belief. Waiting until the last had gone, he sauntered up to Ahmed and offered him a glass of spirits. But the man refused it, and, after peering at him and finally remembering his face, he went and placed himself squarely in the doorway.

Jali explained that he had no wish to go in.

Then what did he want? asked Ahmed.

He replied that, having heard Gunevati was unwell, he had come to inquire after her.

The doorkeeper eyed him suspiciously, then mumbled that she was still ill and could see no one.

Jali expressed regret, and, whilst talking, pressed some money into the man's hand. The effect of this was good; Ahmed became willing to converse upon general topics, but, whenever Jali led round to the subject of Gunevati, he grew taciturn. In a short time it became clear that something was wrong, and that in some way or other Ahmed himself must have come in for a certain amount of blame. The nature of Gunevati's malady remained, however, a mystery; indeed the man spoke in a fashion that made Jali doubtful whether she had been ill at all; and yet Ahmed was so emphatic in his assertions that she had not been out of her room for the last thirty-six hours that it was impossible not to believe that, that at least was true.

Feeling anxious and disturbed, Jali lingered as long as he could; and before going he drew his bow at a venture. 'I will tell you why I am so curious about Gunevati,' he said in a confidential tone. 'The fact is that not many minutes ago I heard some people saying that the Prince himself was taking a great interest in her condition, and was even thinking of coming to pay her a visit.'

The effect of these words upon Ahmed was very unexpected. His face, pale and haggard already as a result of abstention from liquor, turned to a ghastlier hue, and he poured forth a torrent of



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curses, most of which were directed at the Prince. As a means of gaining further information, the ruse had failed completely; wherefore, hastily bidding him good-night, Jali turned and made off down the lane.

His mind was now in a turmoil. It appalled him to reflect that Ahmed had actually regarded a visit from the Prince as within the bounds of possibility. His sole desire on the moment was to question Mansur, who at this hour was generally to be found at his supper in a small eating-house on the lake-front. He hurried on, and was fortunate enough to come upon him just as he was stepping out of the house. Mansur looked slightly flushed with good cheer; his little, twinkling eyes surveyed Jali shrewdly.

'Who are you looking for?' he asked.

'Gunevati,' returned Jali with boldness.

Mansur's face was, as usual, inscrutable. 'Well, you won't find her here.'

'Is she rehearsing?' Jali inquired innocently.

A gleam of amusement came into Mansur's eyes, and he shook his head.

'Well, but — can you tell me where she is?'

Mansur looked down his nose, deliberated, and finally put a hand on Jali's shoulder. 'Look here!' he said laughingly. 'I don't think this Camp is quite the place for you. There are things going on that you don't understand. If I were you, I shouldn't come any more.'

'But what has happened to Gunevati?' asked Jali with trembling lips. 'Is she dead?'

Mansur laughed silently, looking round in his usual fashion for an audience with which to share his sense of his interlocutor's ridiculousness. And an audience happened to be there — in the shape of three young men who had just strolled up. The four of them surveyed Jali smilingly.

'No, no! she isn't dead. At least, not so far as I know. I haven't seen her for two days.'

'Then what is she doing?'

'Sulking. She has been turned out of the cast. And it was high time too. Poor thing, she will never act. It was ridiculous to try to teach her.'

'Is she ill?'

Mansur shrugged and turned away a little, drawing down the

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corners of his mouth. 'I don't know anything about her,' he said shortly.

'But, please — please tell me!' Jali implored. 'I am sure you really know what has happened.'

Mansur was already moving away, but he stopped to shrug again; and now, as he surveyed Jali, his eyes began to twinkle more than ever. 'I *don't* know,' he said, 'but I think I can guess.'

'What?' faltered Jali breathlessly.

'Well, I think — I think she is going to have a baby. That's what's the matter with her.'

'A baby!' Jali gasped.

'Yes, yours.' And, still radiating merriment, Mansur, with his three companions, went on his way.

Dumbfounded, petrified, Jali stood still where he was. The idea presented by Mansur horrified him so much that he was quite incapable of considering the degree of its verisimilitude. A child of his and Gunevati's! a being in which a part of his nature would be mingled with a part of hers! That would be the acme of horror! the last ignominy that life could inflict! A child of his and hers would be a spiritual monstrosity. He didn't believe Mansur — oh no! But his disbelief was merely a frantic rejection of something too abominable to be true.

After recovering from his first stupor, he turned, and, like one demented, ran back by the way he had just come; but instead of making for the front of the building where Gunevati lived, he plunged into a dark, narrow alley that ran along the back of it. The building was of irregular shape, and the alley full of corners, which made it hard for him to find the point he wanted; his object was to gain access to the small yard that he had looked into from the window of Gunevati's room. Deciding at last which was the most likely spot, he hoisted himself over the palings without much difficulty. But the enclosure he dropped into was not the right one; it had no birch-trees in it. Cautiously he looked about him, and in a minute he saw the tops of his trees quite clearly against the night sky. There was another paling between him and them, but this was no more formidable than the one he had already scaled. A minute later he was creeping softly over the grass towards Gunevati's window, which was unshuttered and showed a dim light.

He looked into the room. A solitary candle stood on a table in the centre, and at the other end he could make out the form of

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Gunevati, lying upon her couch, with her face turned to the wall. His eyes stared; they stared as if by sheer intensity of vision he could tear her secrets from her. Once or twice she moved a little; once with a sigh, she threw out an arm.

Supporting himself against the sill, he stared and stared. For him that human form was the focus of all life's mysteries and horrors. Sweat poured down his face, as he stared across the silent room, and wondered.

The minutes went by, unchanging and terrible. His legs were trembling so violently that had he not been able to rest half his weight on the window-sill he would have sunk to the earth. And still he lacked the courage to make the smallest sound.

Then Gunevati stirred; she turned herself round, and a moment later sat up on the edge of the bed. Her face was pale and wore a fixed, heavy look. She gazed straight at him with dark, wide-open eyes. Not for a moment did she appear startled or surprised; she merely frowned, as if wearily resentful of this intrusion on her privacy. For a minute or more the two looked at one another; then with the same slow and heavy motion of her body she turned again and took up her former position with her face to the wall.

Jali made no movement whatsoever. The room turned black before his eyes. Sometimes he could see nothing but the candle; at other times he could make out Gunevati's form in the obscurity beyond it; and then again a veil of darkness would come down and he could see nothing at all.

After an interval — he knew not how long — Gunevati turned her head again, looking to see if he were still there. She considered him sombrely for a few moments, then rose with heavy deliberation to her feet. She picked up the candle from the table and advanced slowly across the room to the window, and there stood, with knitted brows, looking into his face, which was nearly on a level with hers. In his eyes there was anguished interrogation; his lips moved in an effort to question; and this she must have seen. A curious expression came into her face, as she continued to gaze at him. Then slowly she raised the candle until it shone full upon her, and opened her mouth wide. Jali found himself looking into a cavern, black, swollen, horrible — without a tongue.

After a moment she closed her mouth again; she lowered the candle; she turned and went back to her bed, and stretched herself out as before.

So here was Jali now! Here he was, sitting upon a bench outside the old Rajah's house in the morning sunlight, with the lake rippling before his eyes, and a light breeze blowing about him, a breeze filled with the rustle and sparkle of the new-born day.

In his mind there was no sunlight; the darkness of the night still remained there — a darkness that was not of that night only, but of the whole long night of humanity's suffering and evil-doing. Taking the last turn of events by itself, he might have found relief in the thought that Gunevati had been rendered incapable of working any further harm; he might have reflected that the fate which had overtaken her was not undeserved. But he had not yet discovered with any certainty the extent of the harm she had already done; nor could he contemplate her punishment, however well deserved, with any other sentiment than horror.

He had been sitting on this seat for an hour or more in the vague expectation of a summons from Hari or Gokal. But no summons came; and at last he felt that he must act for himself. Well, he was ready! He thought: I will wait until that flock of ducks rises again, and then I will go and speak out.

Half a minute later the signal came, and at once he got up.

## THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER—III

### RAJAH AMAR

#### INTRODUCTION

*HITHERTO* Rajah Amar has not played a very prominent part in this chronicle; now, however, he moves to the centre of the stage, and I count myself fortunate in being able to carry the story forward by quoting passages from his private journal. It is true that, judged purely as a record of events, the Rajah's journal is not entirely satisfactory. Writing only to please himself, he gives his thoughts and feelings a good deal of space; but, since the character of the man now enters as a factor of importance in the development of the general situation, I believe that there is a distinct advantage to be gained from letting the Rajah speak for himself, and reveal himself in his own way. Even his digressiveness is, in a certain sense, illuminating, and in his very sententiousness I often find a faint but pleasing pungency, a flavour of self-mockery. Perhaps I am wrong, but I suspect the Rajah of being a man whose humour it is to pretend that he has none. When I am made to smile by his solemnity, he, I strongly suspect, is secretly smiling too. And when, quite suddenly he comes out with something positively laughable, I cannot believe that this highly self-conscious and self-critical gentleman is unaware of what he has done. For instance, in an opening to a long and rather dull disquisition on racial characteristics he smoothly remarks, 'It has been said that human affinities and antipathies are determined very largely by the sense of smell . . . In my opinion even more important is the religious sense.' And in recounting a conversation with an important personage he says, 'The reply I made was long-winded and slightly pompous,' and again, 'I was beginning a vague and rather insipid reply, when . . .' What, I ask, are we to make of this? Well, for my part, I credit the Rajah, first with a sense of humour, secondly with an eye for some at least of his own foibles, and thirdly with a taste for making fun of himself.

Of this, however, enough. I must beware of laying emphasis on a trait that is, in any case, unimportant. My words would be misleading were they to prepare the reader for flippancy. No, this journal is nothing if not the expression of a mind in a state of high tension, the revelation of a spirit serious and sincere. The Rajah is possessed by a grave sense of the critical nature of the times, and if he is pre-occupied — as well he may be! — by the difficulties of his own particular situation, this pre-occupation is not petty, nor selfish. In one passage of his journal he says: 'Akbar still occupies the Imperial Throne, his figure still looms gigantically in the background; but he

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*gives the impression of having been stricken into semi-petrification; if he is a figure of Destiny, it is of Destiny brooding upon Predestination; and while this inscrutable colossus stirs no finger and makes no sign, we, a swarm of lesser creatures, weave helplessly our intricate dance at his feet.'*

To me, who am familiar with the earlier chapters of this journal, which are chiefly concerned with his religious life, it is curious to observe the change that takes place not only in the tone of his writing, but even, it would seem, in his personality, as soon as he plunges into the world of men and affairs. At first, I must confess, I found this change rather disconcerting, for I did not like the Rajah so well in his new character. Little by little, however, I came to understand what had happened: Amar was conscientiously endeavouring to be untrue to himself. That was the trouble, and I recognized it as dating from the time, when, still a boy, he had become the ruler of a little State. Born a contemplative, well did he know that nothing could ever make him of the world nor for the world, — worldliness, he knew, was even farther from him than the saintliness to which he aspired; — and yet, since he was in the world — and occupying, indeed, a not irresponsible position there, — it behoved him to acquit himself properly in his mundane part. To render — gracefully and in exact measure — unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; that became his ambition! Poor Amar! His earlier diaries contain passages which show how much effort went in this endeavour; and, if he achieved any kind of success, it is still open to us to doubt whether the effort was not misapplied. For we cannot help suspecting him of over-valuing the qualities in which he is deficient, of over-estimating accomplishments that are worth acquiring only at a lesser cost.

By a curious piece of good fortune a portrait of the Rajah is extant. It is the product of a rather poor Persian artist, working without imagination within the limits of a strict convention. He shows us his royal subject standing stiffly in full dress uniform in what is probably a deer-park. The park is full of innocent animals, — we notice in particular a lamb prancing in a little patch of flowers in the background. The Rajah faces us with a look of supreme detachment, — he seems, indeed, completely absent from the earthly scene; and yet in one hand he holds a piece of sugar — or is it salt? — which he is offering to a doe. This creature the artist has succeeded in investing with an air of extraordinary respectfulness — so much so that she seems to be on the point of dropping a curtsy. A picture of more skill and sophistication might well have been less revealing. Convention has forced the artist to make Amar superbly upright, voluminously sashed, hugely turbaned, and encased in a tunic that sticks out all about him like a ballet-dancer's tulle; but it has not stood in the way of a very painstaking and no doubt accurate

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*delineation of feature. We look fairly and squarely into a long, narrow, clean-shaven face. The chin is firm, the mouth expressive of purpose, the eyes deepset. This would be the face of a man whose vision is narrow, did the eyes not reveal a character critically watchful of itself.*

# RAJAH AMAR

## PART ONE

RAJAH AMAR sailed across the lake just after dawn. He stepped out of the boat on to the pier and drew the folds of his white cloak about him. A fresh breeze and a level light were streaming down the valley, tipping the ripe meadow-grasses with gold and the wavelets with silver. At this early hour the promenade of the Pleasance of the Arts was empty save for a few sweepers who were brushing away the litter of a festive night. The dust that went up from their brooms was gilded into beauty by the sun; it rose like the smoke of incense before the shuttered pleasure-houses behind.

And the Rajah said to himself: 'For many months I have been like a messenger who sits upon the outer step and waits. He watches the passers-by, he dreams, he smiles to himself. He is waiting.

'When in the spring a mountain river is dammed up by a wall of ice, a still lake forms; the silent water leans and leans; day after day the valley rests in quiet; but one day the break comes.'

Turning northward towards the high mountains, he fixed upon the mists that were veiling them a long and frowning look; and slowly, as he gazed, there emerged a phantasmal glitter, a vision that hung so loftily above the morning haze that his imagination could not join it to the solid earth. He gazed, and it was as if his spirit sailed from out of him; it sailed like a cloudlet amongst those ice-bound peaks. Closing his eyes, he conjured up a vision of the peaks at night. His spirit drifted as a vapour through black, frost-deadened night, amongst ice-slopes lit only by their own whiteness and the scintillation of unnumbered stars.

O silent dark! Cold, silent, bediamonded dark! Not the jungle-dark, full of violence and stealth; not the recurrent, red dark of life-blood; not the restless, blue dark of the sea; but the dark of the heights — Nirvana!

*(Here the Rajah takes up the tale in his own words.)*

The sound of a step behind caused me to turn my head. A big, swarthy, fleshy man who was approaching, hailed me genially by name. 'Rajah Amar! What an early visit! I suppose it means that



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you are anxious to catch the Prince before he makes his start. Well, there is no hurry. Daniyal certainly won't get off before noon.'

I replied that I had come to see Shaik Mobarek, not the Prince.

'But what makes you think he will be ready at this hour?'

'He has often told me that he wakes at dawn, and that he likes to receive visitors as early as possible.'

'Extraordinary! At his age too! I am told he is nearly eighty. A most remarkable man.' The newcomer broke off to gaze intently at the rippling water. 'Do you know, but for this cold wind, I think I would take a dip. In fact, that was my intention in coming down here.'

At last it came back to me that I had run across this man — his name was Churaman — two or three times before: once at my sister's house in Agra and then at some court function. On these occasions I had not taken to him particularly; his manner had seemed to me rather too free and easy, — as if he were trying to make up in self-assurance for what he lacked in breeding.

'If you like,' Churaman went on, 'I will show you the way to the Shaik's house; and perhaps you won't mind if I come in with you for a moment. The Shaik always interests me. A wicked old man, perhaps; but a remarkable personality! The last time we met, I remember, he had a bad toothache; and with his head muffled up in a shawl he looked like a very clever, very malicious old dowager — and he talked rather like one too.'

Churaman chuckled as he spoke, but I did not respond. To be without respect, or to pretend to be without respect, for those who stand high above you — this is to be guilty of either an unintentional or an intentional stupidity.

As we proceeded along the lake-front, my eyes wandered over the outward scene; I looked, in a kind of trance, at Daniyal's fantastic house-fronts aglow in the slanting sunlight; I looked at our far-flung shadows moving before us over the frayed flanking of the vulgar promenade; I looked upwards and saw huge masses of white cloud rolling before the wind. For a few seconds my old doubts returned; I thought of Sita, and my intended withdrawal from the world seemed to me both selfish and unjustified. But the next moment I reminded myself that Sita was no less religious than I. She would remember that her own prophet has said: 'Everyone that hath forsaken wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' I be-

thought me once again that he who waits upon the world to release him waits till death. Worldly affairs drag on; one entanglement transforms itself into another. However long I were to delay, the moment must inevitably come when I should have to do violence to my own feelings and those of others. Well! that moment was here now. Here I was with my feet upon the road!

These meditations were interrupted by a strange spectacle. Coming up from one of the jetties, there appeared a group of men with one in their midst who seemed to be without the use of his limbs. He was urged along by two boatmen, whilst others followed behind. The young man thus attended presented a pitiable appearance; water dripped from his clothing, his sodden turban had been clapped on to his head all awry. His face was ashen, his eyes vacant and wild. I halted, and my astonishment was increased when I observed that, although the young man's dress was indicative of high rank, his rescuers were treating him with scant ceremony — hardly, indeed, with ordinary consideration. When his turban fell off, those behind kicked it along with gibes, and although the half-drowned wretch was begging for a moment's halt, his escorts continued to hustle him forward without an instant's respite.

I was about to intervene when Churaman laid a hand upon my arm, and in a low hurried voice begged me to pay no heed. The young man, he assured me, was 'all right'; the boatmen, too, knew quite well what they were about; this was not the first time that such a thing had happened. Churaman spoke with such evident understanding of the case that I complied. But, as the young man passed, I received another shock of surprise. 'Surely,' I said, 'that is Prince Dantawat?'

There was a pause before Churaman answered, and I saw his expression change several times. When they did come, his words were spoken in that candid and confidential tone of voice that at once inspires mistrust. Poor Prince Dantawat, he explained, had had 'various troubles', as a result of which he was now 'slightly unbalanced'. The strain of living in the Camp had been too much for him. 'Yes, that's the truth of the matter: It is sad, very sad; for Dantawat is really such a nice fellow. A little neurotic, of course; and then — well, Daniyal has been rather inconsiderate to him lately, and I am afraid he has taken it too much to heart. However, Dantawat will soon recover, if — if only we can get him away. All he needs is a change.'

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'You mean that Prince Dantawat threw himself into the lake?'

'Well — yes!' The admission was made reluctantly.

'And this has happened before?'

Again Churaman's expression presented an interesting study. I could see that, although he felt a genuine pity for Dantawat, he was amused; and I suspected that amongst his own friends he would very soon be treating the whole affair as an excellent joke.

'Well, to tell the truth,' he replied at last, 'Dantawat *has* behaved like this before. You see, he wants to attract Daniyal's attention. Daniyal certainly is rather unfeeling at times.'

At this point I laid constraint upon myself. Knowing that Churaman had arrived at the Camp only a week or so ago, I decided to impose on him a little, if I could. I began talking about Daniyal and his friends as if I were more familiar with them than I really am; and these tactics were successful, for presently Churaman fell to speaking with a good deal of freedom. It evidently pleased him to let me see that he had known Daniyal quite well in early days. This intimacy had arisen out of the circumstance that Churaman's foster-mother and Prince Salim's had been sisters; and the three children, thus brought together in infancy, had kept up a certain companionship during boyhood. In age Churaman came midway between Salim and Daniyal, and his friendship had gradually transferred itself from the elder to the younger brother, for Salim had grown up rough, hectoring, and unintelligent, while Daniyal had been good-looking, well-mannered, and extremely precocious. All three boys, however, had remained fairly good friends, until Salim, in the beginning of his seventeenth year, suddenly developed a violent hatred of his brother, who was then about twelve. The reason for this hatred Churaman at first professed himself quite unable to define, but a little later he said in his rapid, offhand way: 'Oh, it was jealousy, of course! Pure jealousy! At the time when Salim was a big, shaggy, rough-looking youth, Daniyal was really quite beautiful. He had dignity, too. Such a contrast to Salim, who had nothing but bluster and swagger! Even at the age of twelve, Daniyal was much the more advanced, much more of a man of the world. Salim thought of nothing but polo and hunting. Daniyal was interested in — well, in lots of things.'

'What things?' I asked.

'Oh, in — in people and everything. I mean he revealed an artistic nature; he was in fact exceedingly knowing for his age. Not that he

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was much of a talker in those days. No, he was very silent, very reserved. Not shy; but — for a small boy — extraordinarily self-contained. For one thing, he had no mother, you must remember. There was no one with whom he was intimate. Salim's mother, who brought him up, was as kind as anyone could be; but he never took to her.'

Here Churaman broke off — rather abruptly, as it seemed. But I showed such a flattering interest in what he was saying that he started off again. Daniyal, he said, at this time had become a great favourite with the grooms and men of the royal elephant stables. 'Oddly enough, although he was no horseman, he got on with the men much better than Salim. This made Salim jealous, and then it was that they had — well, it was a dreadful affair.'

Again Churaman stopped. Nor could I get him to tell me what 'the affair' was. I could see that he was thinking over what he had said and wondering how much I could read between the lines. As a matter of fact I was quite in the dark. Perhaps my expression revealed it, for presently his own interest in what he had to say carried him forward again.

'Really,' he exclaimed, 'it was extraordinary, the relationship between these two boys! At times Salim's brutality was almost unbelievable; yet Daniyal never seemed to avoid it. There is no doubt that he fascinated Salim, and that he knew he did. Salim couldn't forget him, couldn't ignore him, as he longed to do. For weeks at a time he would pretend to be unaware of Daniyal's existence, but this pretence always ended in a scene of unusual brutality. And Daniyal, even while he was being knocked about, somehow kept his air of superiority; it was as if he knew that he was really scoring off Salim all the time. But I must say that when Salim was sent away Daniyal felt it to be a relief. In a short time he became quite changed. He gathered round him a circle of friends, — clever boys that Salim would never have got on with.'

'Since then,' I observed, 'he and Salim have of course met very little.'

Churaman nodded. 'I shall never forget the one occasion when I witnessed a meeting between them. Salim flushed and glowered, and could not find a single word. Daniyal, on the other hand, smiled and was perfectly amiable. In the end it looked as if Salim was going to knock him down.'

A little later we were speaking about the present rivalry between

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the two brothers and the question of taking sides. 'Thank heaven!' exclaimed Churaman, 'I am nothing but a poor artist. Politics simply don't concern me at all.'

'But your sympathies,' I said smiling, 'are obviously with Daniyal.'

'I am an artist,' Churaman repeated, 'and I naturally have more in common with Daniyal, to whom art means something.'

I paused; I was thinking that were Churaman a true artist, he would hold Daniyal's clique in particular abhorrence — just as to me the self-deceiving and the self-righteous are more odious than confessed cynics.

'Yes,' I replied at last, 'you are fortunate, but, all the same, I doubt whether there is a single man in the Empire who can say that the question of the succession is a matter of no interest to him.'

Churaman smiled and said quickly: 'At any rate, I am not one of those who run the risk of being beheaded, if he finds himself on the losing side.'

I joined him in his laugh. 'Nor I. At least I hope not. But now tell me: Which, in your opinion, will be the losing side?'

Without a moment's hesitation Churaman replied: 'Salim's.'

'You feel so sure?'

'Yes, — and I can easily explain why.'

'Tell me.'

'First, Daniyal is the cleverer; secondly, he has the cleverer friends; and, thirdly, his friends have the ear of the Emperor. Daniyal has Mobarek and Mabun Das on his side; surely that by itself ought to assure him the victory.'

I looked at Churaman and said nothing.

'Surely,' he went on in a tone of irritation, 'Surely Akbar has enough common sense to realize what is best for the Empire? Of course neither Salim nor Daniyal are all that he could wish; but he sees that Daniyal's faults are his own private affair, whereas Salim's are of the kind to work public mischief.'

I shrugged. I was not going to argue the matter with Churaman, who to my thinking was simplifying the problem quite unwarrantably. Was it possible that he did not know it? Was he incapable of grasping either the subtleties of Akbar's character or the complexity of the forces that govern the course of the world's history? The Emperor combines naivety, cunning, and idealism. His cunning is naive, his naivety is cunning, and his idealism is both — as well as something more. If I could define that something more, I could

define the character of Life itself. I believe Akbar's idealism to be of a kind that will never throw him off the road that leads to worldly success. This sounds like a sneer at Akbar, but it is rather a comment upon the world. Never have I met an idealism that I have felt to be wholly pure, never have I met a heart that I have felt to be wholly honest, but that it has proved a handicap to its possessor. Were it not for the examples provided by Christ and Buddha, I should say there is no greatness, no generosity, no graciousness, in man or in woman, that can win worldly recognition on its own merits alone. In general the virtues and graces that are famous are those that are heavily alloyed. When Mobarek says that Akbar's choice will be utilitarian, and that expediency points unmistakably to Daniyal, he is, I repeat, grossly simplifying the problem. I, for my part, feel certain that Akbar will be guided by his idealism, but, Akbar's choice once made, I shall say: '*That* was ultimately expedient. For such is Akbar, and such is the nature of the world.'

We were now approaching a house of some importance that stood inside an enclosure of its own. Among the men standing by the gate several were wearing the uniform of Mobarek's household. When I announced myself, I was at once admitted, and Churaman followed me in. A few minutes later a secretary appeared, and, after asking me a few questions, bowed and escorted us into the Shaik's presence.

Mobarek was occupying a large room on the ground floor. Glancing round, as I came in, I recognized many of the tapestries, curtains, and rugs, as being his own property. Some of the furniture, too, was his, notably the throne-like bed at the end of the room, with its canopy of embroidered Chinese silk. In this bed the Shaik was now reclining, propped up with cushions, a fur tippet over his shoulders, and papers spread out on the counterpane. Secretaries and attendants stood on either side. As we advanced, with a sweep of his hand he pushed the litter of papers away from him, and his voice rang out in greetings — greetings which to my mistrustful ears sounded too amiable to be sincere.

STUDYING the Shaik in the clear light of morning, I was struck by his freshness in old age. I could not help comparing him with my own father, to whom the years had brought not only infirmity of body but also decay of mind. *His* years seemed to have stripped him of nothing but youth's weaknesses and inconsequences. Left with a frame from which all the heavy humours of the flesh had long since been dried out, he made the slenderness and saplessness of old age seem actually no disadvantage. Against his canopy of crimson and gold this little old man shone with a silvery brightness; he convinced you that with only dry pith and a few tendons to call his own, he was far better equipped than you for the struggle of life. His eyes rested on us smilingly, brilliantly, and while he spoke, his hands, pale and light as thistle-down, waved upon the air a delicate accompaniment to his speech.

'My friends,' he cried. 'You find me really at my wit's end. As you know, the Prince should have started for Kathiapur at least forty-eight hours ago. It was most important that he should be there in time to meet Princess Lālita and his future father-in-law. He promised me yesterday that he would make an early start this morning, yet now I hear that he is still in bed — in bed and chatting to his friends! He even tells about conducting another rehearsal this afternoon.'

Although Mobarek spoke laughingly, it was to be seen that he was really perturbed. I seated myself in a chair that had been brought forward for me, whilst Churaman, wrinkling his brows, paced to and fro on the other side of the bed. Mobarek followed him with his eyes, and presently added softly: 'The Prince has that play of his on the brain. He can think of nothing else.'

Churaman nodded.

'You were with him at the last rehearsal?'

'I was.'

'My dear Churaman,' said Mobarek, and his voice was soft as silk, 'I think the Prince suggested not long ago that you should conduct the rehearsals in his absence? He has the very highest opinion of your knowledge in these matters. Well, for heaven's sake, go and see him at once! Inspire him with confidence! Persuade him that

you will conduct these last rehearsals even better than he could himself! Do you think you can manage it?"

For a moment Churaman maintained an impressive silence. Then: 'Yes!' he said, 'I will go now.'

'Excellent!' said Mobarek with a charming smile. 'You will be a public benefactor if you succeed.'

'I will do my best,' returned Churaman, and with that he strode out of the room.

As the door closed behind him Mobarek turned to me. 'I owe you a thousand apologies, Rajah. You expected a quiet talk, and instead . . . But you see what a predicament I am in. Imagine the Khan and Princess Lalita waiting hour by hour, day by day, for Daniyal who does not arrive! You know the Khan, Rajah. He is not the man to endure such things patiently. Trifles, do you say? Ah, but such trifles tell! They mount up — and they tell. The Khan is not finding Daniyal very satisfactory. Nor is the Emperor. And as for Lalita herself — well, I don't disguise from you that the Prince makes a rather poor lover. With him, I am afraid, Art comes first.'

These last words issued from the old man's lips with an effect that struck me as peculiar; the tone in which they were pronounced gave me no clue how to take them. I looked at Mobarek hard, but the Shaik's face so often wears a smile of quiet interior amusement that his expression at this moment was quite unrevealing. With his chin on his breast he appeared to be sunk in an ironic contemplation of Daniyal's wayward personality; nevertheless his eyes were alert; I felt sure that I was being studied; and my response was cautious. 'I have been told,' I said, 'that Daniyal is not particularly anxious to marry.'

'Perhaps not. Perhaps not. You see, he is already wedded to the Arts.'

The note of humour was quite clearly sounded now, but I still felt it wise to ignore the lead given me. 'Princess Lalita,' I said, 'shows, no doubt, a sympathetic understanding of his character.'

'Yes; fortunately the dear Princess makes allowances. I give her great credit for it. She is a clever girl, although, as you know, impulsive.'

My face remained wooden. The truth is that at the time I did not perceive the meaning that might be lurking behind those last words. It was not until I began thinking them over afterwards that there flashed upon me a remembrance of the moment when I had caught



in the garden. There for a quarter of an hour he would hold solitary communion with the Deity.

Whilst he was speaking, his face suddenly became very red, and after a moment he broke off and rushed to the door. In subdued, but forcible tones, I heard him giving orders to the servants outside that they were to disperse a group of children who were shouting and laughing by the lake. When he returned to me his colour was still high. 'The gong that sounded a few minutes ago was a signal that absolute silence should be preserved round and about the house. That is one of the commands laid down by His Majesty. He has said: "The Emperor is the vice-regent of God; the chief Priests are the vice-regents of the Emperor. When their prayers arise, let no man shake the air with any sound louder than his natural breathing."'

I answered this with a grave nod, and, feeling dispensed from further conversation, drew away, sat down, and followed my own thoughts. These were concerned with Mobarek, whose character puzzled and interested me exceedingly. Its dominant note has always seemed to me to be a passion for organization, and for the discipline that organization both requires and enforces. I respect this trait. In the individual it betokens self-respect, and in the race it makes for civilization. But Mobarek is too much set upon grading human worth, and the standard which he uses is not a good one. I do not say that he leaves ultimate values out of account, my complaint is that they are not accepted as supreme; they are given a place on a scale that is essentially worldly. Of course the Emperor presents a figure that does not fit very conveniently into Mobarek's scheme of things. Akbar has many characteristics that he is obliged to regard with humorous indulgence. But then I have noticed that occasionally (perhaps, in order to give his reverence more lustre) he likes to speak of even God upon a jesting tone; and similarly, when he makes fun of the Emperor, it is always with the implication that in Akbar even absurdities become august. From first to last he is incapable of disloyalty to the caste spirit. Confronted with the necessity of conferring upon either Salim or Daniyal the advantage of his support, he did not, I imagine, hesitate for one instant. No! Salim he would regard as a reckless and intractable boor. Daniyal may offend his taste in many ways, but he sees in him a useful tool. In Daniyal he finds a disposition not too ambitious to be dangerous, and a cynicism of which he knows he can take advantage. This in

addition to a figure the flashiness of which imposes upon the vulgar world of to-day.

I imagine he had no difficulty in persuading Daniyal to adopt the new religion, upon which his heart is set. This vague, bodiless creed is the ostensible rationale of the all-embracing hierarchic order which it is his ambition to establish. Bent upon the welding of secular and sacred authority, he finds in our caste system a framework round which to build. But nothing can be done without reconciling the Brahmins and inducing them to take their place in his scheme. It is this that has focused his interest upon Gokal; and here — as I now begin to see — here it is that I, too, make a claim upon his attention. Gokal's is such a commanding figure that his acceptance of the Din Ilahi would bring in the great majority of the Brahmins who are now in fact hesitant. *I* take my importance as the person most likely to be able to persuade Gokal to give them the lead. Yes, I believe this to be the explanation that I have been seeking, the motive at the bottom of Mobarek's overtures. It is strange, perhaps, that the idea did not come to me before. The truth of course is that for the past months my mind has been occupied with matters of a very different order, and I find it hard to set in motion again the machinery of worldly calculation.

But I must return to my narrative. I was gazing meditatively out of the window, when my eye fell upon Churaman, who was striding along the road at a great pace. The next minute I heard him shouting to the servants outside; and a moment later he burst into the room.

'News!' he cried. 'I have some really exciting news!'

'You have had a talk with Daniyal?'

'Yes.'

'And you were successful?'

'Well, not exactly. But — the whole situation has changed.' He paused, looking round the room. 'Where is the Shaik?'

'Here.' And, turning round, I saw that Mobarek had returned, and was inviting us to rejoin him in the larger room.

Churaman pushed past me with impetuosity. 'Shaik!' he cried, 'I have great tidings.'

Mobarek smiled at him composedly.

'Perhaps you have already heard? Prince Salim has made a move! Civil war has begun!'

I did not take this announcement very seriously. As for Mobarek he threw out his hands with a shrug.

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'Yes, Salim has made a move,' repeated Churaman, still with gusto.

'You mean . . .' I began.

'I mean,' interrupted Churaman, 'that he has marched out of Allahabad at the head of his army, and is making in this direction.'

'His army is not quartered anywhere near Allahabad,' I murmured; and Mobarek added: 'These rumours have been running over the Camp for the last month.'

Churaman drew himself up. 'I am telling you what I have just heard from Daniyal himself, and what he believes to be true. Salim is said to be heading straight for this place. He is at the head of seventeen thousand horsemen, his express purpose being to cut us off.'

A look of impatience passed over Mobarek's face, and he replied rather coolly that 'Salim's move' portended very little. It could not be anything more than a demonstration made for political ends.

Churaman, feeling slightly snubbed, turned to me. 'I mentioned to the Prince that you were here, and he said he was delighted to hear it. There were one or two matters that he particularly wanted to see you about.'

I felt some surprise, but said nothing. The prospect of a meeting with the Prince was not particularly agreeable to me, but I tried not to let this be apparent.

Churaman addressed himself to Mobarek again. 'Daniyal asked me to tell you that he would be here in another hour or so. I could not persuade him. . . .' He broke off because Mobarek had moved to the window, and was looking out with a frown on his face. We joined him and saw an altercation going on at the outer gate. It was the unfortunate Dantawat, to whom admittance was being roughly denied.

Mobarek turned to Churaman with a rather chilly suavity. 'It would be a kindness on your part, if you would go out and take poor Prince Dantawat away. And will you come back again a little later when the Prince is here? Then perhaps some arrangement can be made about the rehearsals.'

Churaman bowed and took himself off, whereupon Mobarek looked at me, smiled, and said: 'Come! We will continue our talk.'

HE led me into a little room at the back of the house, in the middle of which there stood a Chinese tray covered with light refreshments. His dress, I noticed, was now very superb, and his manner seemed to have become more lordly; but beneath these airs I observed a new friendliness of disposition. Laying his hand upon my shoulder, he smiled into my face — rather strangely, I thought — before bidding me sit down.

‘Rajah,’ said he, seating himself opposite, ‘we look at life from different angles, you and I, but that does not mean that our immediate political views and aims are bound to be antagonistic. I think you are inclined to agree with me on two important points: first, that a compromise ought to be possible between the Brahmins and the Din Ilahi, and, secondly, that Daniyal’s succession to the Throne is, on the whole, preferable to Salim’s. Here then — and these two questions cover nearly the whole field of practical politics at the moment — we do not disagree.’

Leaning forward across the low table, he smiled into my face, and again I was conscious of a certain sympathy between us. Nevertheless the reply I made was long-winded and slightly pompous. I adopted this tone because I wanted to show Mobarek that I was not afraid of being a prig; and I ended up by stating quite explicitly that I was anxious to find out whether Daniyal’s intellectual and moral defects were such as to make it impossible for me to join his party.

Mobarek’s answer was splendid in its implied self-commendation. Daniyal’s chief fault, he said, was irresponsibility, and this would cause him to lean upon his advisers; thus his very defect would indirectly minister to the welfare of the Empire.

A little later I said something about Daniyal’s equalitarian ideas, and at this Mobarek pursed his lips and became astonishingly, but by no means unpleasingly, sententious. ‘Between man and man,’ he pronounced, ‘there is more difference in spiritual worth than between man and the beasts of the field, for to us God has bestowed the power greatly to exalt or to debase ourselves. Looking around me, I see some men who are as animals, others who approach to

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angelhood. The theory of the equality of men is too absurd to affect practical politics. What, I ask you, is society, if not the systematizing of the natural inequalities between race and race, caste and caste, and man and man?"

'That may be so,' I replied, 'but all the same the Prince . . .'

'The Prince,' interrupted Mobarek sternly, 'has accepted the Din Ilahi, and such ideas as are inconsistent with that faith he must discard. Only the other day I pointed out to him that the law of society is but an extension of the law of God. Upon this earth we see an ordered hierarchy of creatures from the lowest to the highest, and beyond our vision there exists an enormously elaborate and magnificent hierarchy of Spiritual Beings.' He looked up, heavenwards, for a moment, then went on slowly: 'Yes, and again, beyond these there dwells, in dazzling and impenetrable mystery, an incomprehensible and sublime Power, of whom the Sun may be regarded as the physical symbol.'

I had not realized before how the influences of childhood had persisted in this old man. Mobarek evidently has an adoration of, of reverence for, the sun, fire, and light, after the Zoroastrian manner; his Sufi doctrines have suffused the Din Ilahi with a colouring derived from generations of primitive Sun-worshippers.

'Rajah,' he continued, 'let me remind you of the verses in which Jalal Ud-Din Rumi, four hundred years ago, expressed God's divine law:

' "I died from mineral and plant became;  
Died from the plant, and took a sentient frame;  
Died from the beast, and donned a human dress;  
When by my dying did I e'er grow less?"  
Another time from manhood I must die  
To soar with angel-pinions through the sky.  
As angel also must I fade away,  
Since everything shall perish save his Day.  
Let me be Naught! For all things do proclaim  
That 'unto Him do we return again!' "

'This is the evolution of spirit in passage through material and semi-material worlds. Jalal Ud-Din's words are inspired. No doubt they will receive useful certification in a later age by those who move upon their feet instead of using wings. Personally I believe that one day science will make much of this divinely ordained progression of

life; — nor will science neglect the study of *light*. When I speak of light as the source and seed of life I am using no mere figure of speech. The rays of light from the sun may be regarded either as a very tenuous form of matter, or as energy, or as angels from the mind of God. The Emperor by divine inspiration is powerfully imbued with this truth.'

He was looking at me fixedly and I suppose my face was not sufficiently responsive, for his gaze suddenly became severe, and he went on: 'Is it possible that you are unaware that at noon of the day when the sun enters the nineteenth degree of Aries, the whole world being then surrounded by his light, the Emperor causes a round piece of a white and shining stone to be exposed to God's beams? A piece of cotton is then held under it, which catches fire from the concentrated rays. This celestial fire is committed to the care of proper persons. The lamp-lighters, torch-bearers, and cooks of the royal household use it for their offices; and when a year has passed away, they renew the fire.' He paused, then added; 'The sun is the torch by which God's sovereignty is illuminated for our eyes.'

I gazed at Mobarek with the deepest interest, and my heart warmed towards him. While I was considering my reply, he took up speech again — this time in a different tone.

'I think you are critical of the Prince.' There was a light of amusement in his eyes. 'Well, I am not uncritical of him myself. I see his faults as well as anyone.'

'They are the faults of youth?' I suggested.

'Yes, but he will never outgrow them.'

'No?'

'No.'

For a moment we were silent; then Mobarek gave a shrug. 'We speak of the faults of youth as if they belonged only to youth, but as a matter of fact most men never learn to do more than dissimulate them. Those faults, if they are faults, spring from a fundamental principle, the instinct to rebel.'

I was a little surprised, and I let him see it.

'Everyone,' he went on decisively, 'contains within himself the impulses of the rebel, the revolutionary, the enemy of order and discipline.'

'The instinct to destroy?' I added.

Mobarek gave me a quick look. 'That is possible. All change

involves destruction. What we see in the young is a revolt against two tyrannies: the tyranny of the Past and the tyranny of Nature. I expect you, Rajah, as a much younger man, to be less intolerant of Daniyal's faults than I am. My age cramps me. Much of what Daniyal wants to destroy seems to me better than anything he has to put in its place. However, he and I will counterbalance one another.'

'You speak with remarkable detachment,' I said.

'As for the revolt against Nature,' he continued, 'that, too, has its uses. If it conduces to the cult of the stylized, the conventionalized, the artificial, just for their own sakes, it also, more broadly, makes for civilization.'

'Civilization?' I echoed. 'At what point between barbarism and decadence does civilization reign? If a civilized community be defined as one where you find aesthetic preoccupations, subtle thought, and polished intercourse, is civilization necessarily desirable? Aesthetic preoccupations are not inconsistent with a wholly inadequate conception of the range and power of art; thought may be subtle and yet trivial; and polished intercourse may be singularly uninteresting.'

Mobarek smiled, and remained silent for some time; then — 'The point I want to emphasize,' he went on, 'is that the rebellious instinct is in reality *constructive*; it only appears *destructive* in its more naive and superficial manifestations, — that is to say in its attacks upon what the young man feels to be outworn, cumbersome and restrictive. The past — and the actually passing — are the fulcrum against which the lever of youth must press. Daniyal's attitude to the Emperor and the whole of the old school is, in my view, quite foolish in many respects. I am not particularly interested in Art, so of that I will not speak; but his social and political ideas often seem to me ridiculous.'

'His attitude at present,' I murmured, 'is not very helpful to you. I mean in regard to the Princess and her father. May I ask whether Lalita herself is anxious to come to the Camp?'

Mobarek pursed his lips.

'Forgive me for speaking discouragingly,' I went on, 'but I am wondering whether you are not going to find it difficult to bring off this match. The Princess's own inclinations might — in the circumstances — just turn the scale.'

'You are quite right, Rajah.' There was a humorous gleam in

Mobarek's eyes. 'You are quite right. And that is why I have just decided that I must go to Kathiapur myself. I shall start to-morrow. The apologies and excuses I shall make for the Prince will be better than any he could make for himself. It will not be my fault if Lalita doesn't return here with me.'

I admired the old man's energy and self-confidence. 'The Prince has good friends,' I said. 'I hope he will prove to us all that he deserves them.'

Mobarek smiled; he was looking at me fixedly. 'I want you to come with me, Rajah.'

This suggestion did not surprise me overmuch. Mobarek of course knew that Ambissa had been begging me to come to Kathiapur. 'You want me to accompany you?' I said slowly. 'Well, after all, why not? I am much flattered by your invitation.'

'Then you will?' said Mobarek quickly. 'Excellent!'

'And yet . . .' I hesitated.

'I think that when you crossed the lake this morning . . .' said Mobarek, looking at me with a smile.

I could not help stiffening. The old man was showing almost too much insight. 'I had no fixed plans,' I said.

'No. But you were determined to let yourself be guided by the play of events. So, if I press you . . . ?'

I laughed. 'Yes.'

Mobarek leant across the table to lay a hand on my arm. 'That gives me the greatest pleasure. And now' — he rose with briskness to his feet — 'we must rejoin our friends. The Prince may be here at any moment.'

I followed him into a large reception-room, where we found Churaman with several young men of the Prince's train. Their heads together, they were chattering and giggling like schoolgirls; but as soon as Mobarek appeared, the conversation changed its tone. After a while, having separated Churaman from the crowd, I succeeded in bringing him back to the subject of Daniyal. In Churaman's opinion the fact that Daniyal's mother was a slave-girl has exercised a powerful influence upon the Prince's character. This is interesting. Interesting, too, is the information that Daniyal cannot endure the sight of physical pain. He declares that at the mass execution of the Vamacharis, about six months ago, the Prince actually fainted.

Finally we got on to the subject of the Prince's marriage; and



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here Churaman went further than he can have intended in the way of self-revelation. In describing the series of incivilities that Lalita had received at Daniyal's hands, he allowed a considerable satisfaction to appear. My first supposition was that at some time or other the Princess had slighted him; but when it presently came out that the two had never met, it became clear that Churaman was using the tone of the Camp — a tone for which Daniyal is himself no doubt responsible. Now, my own opinion of Lalita (formed upon very slight acquaintance) is not particularly favourable; but that does not alter my judgment upon Daniyal in this matter, nor did it help me tolerate Churaman's tone. I rejoined Mobarek, and remained with him until the Prince was announced.

THE moment he entered the room I was seized with dismay. On our previous meetings, certainly, I had found him unprepossessing enough; but never — no, never before — had he affected me like this. His appearance, his gestures, the inflections of his voice — in short the whole presence and personality of this young man were infinitely displeasing. With a sinking heart I asked myself whether I should ever find it possible, in any circumstances, to range myself on his side, or to propose to Sita that she should do so. Wonderingly I glanced at Mobarek. His face of smiling urbanity was a lesson to me.

For some time after Daniyal had made his entrance, and while he was deploying himself with a distressing superabundance of speech and gesture, we stood about him, proclaiming with courtiers' smiles that our eyes and ears were entranced. 'Oh my dear Shaik! My beloved Guru!' — to give an example of his style — 'Isn't this too atrocious! My dear, can you conceive it, — two hundred of my wretched guests have run away already! Yes, two hundred of them, including at least half a dozen members of my cast! Members of the cast, mind you! And some of them had quite important parts. Tell me, what am I to do? Isn't it just like Salim to play me this trick? The rumours spread round the Camp yesterday evening have all been traced to his spies. You don't believe me! But, my dear, the Camp is swarming with them! Why, I know many of them quite well by sight! I went up to one the other day and said: "My dear good man, I know you mean well; I know you want to do what you can to earn the money that my excellent brother is paying you. Pray go where you like, and do what you like, and report what you like! Only, I implore you, don't interfere with my actors! Don't interfere with my play!" — But Salim, I imagine, has already been told that I am putting him in as a comic figure. And here is the result! In his fury he is doing all he can to stop the performance.'

Of this kind of thing the Prince gave us full measure; and all the while he was spinning about on his heels, gesticulating, and making his pale blue cloak billow out behind him. For a while I thought he

was exaggerating his customary frivolity out of bravado, but a little later my impression changed. I now believe that the face has melted away behind the mask, that the posturer has swallowed up the man. Daniyal, I swear, has become in fact no more than what he makes himself appear.

After a while, when the effect of his entry had worn off, he made a pretence of catching sight of me for the first time. This gave him a fresh impetus, and he saluted me with an effusiveness so unmeasured, so obviously artificial, that I became not a little embarrassed. I am, I may say, an exceptionally unsuitable subject for the exercise of charm. The moment I suspect anyone of making a conscious effort in this direction, I am seized with discomfort. Without question, to respond rightly to such manners as Daniyal's is an art in itself — an art in which I have not — thank heaven! — had occasion to take much practice. For this reason, when I look back upon the scene, I am seized with misgivings. I can't be sure that I was successful in concealing what I felt. It is true that Daniyal's manner did not change, his egregious affability did not abate, but I should be unwise to take reassurance from that. Daniyal may very likely have been too astute to alter his manner by a single shade, even though he *did* see what effect it had on me.

Before long he was back on the subject of Salim. 'That big brother of mine, Rajah, has two hobbies: war and religion. Both of them, you see, give him an excuse for killing people; and that is what he most enjoys. For political reasons, too, his religious life is becoming very beautiful just now; I am told that he turns his face towards Mecca and lifts up his behind in prayer at least four times a day.'

This sally was meant for all to hear, and after everyone had duly applauded it — 'I do think,' he added, 'Salim is getting too big a boy for that sort of thing, don't you, Rajah?'

'Alas!' he continued a little later, 'the piping days of peace are over. At any moment Salim may come rushing into my theatre — to find us, probably, shaking our sides at his counterpart upon the stage! Heavens, what a massacre will follow! And what a glorious day it will be for him, the dear man! In one fell swoop he will have cleared the country of everybody of any intelligence. Yes, India, after that, will become a perfect paradise for our rulers; and all the other governments of the world will turn green with envy.'

It is a serious failing of mine that I cannot endure this kind of thing with patience. But worse was yet to come. After dismissing

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his suite, the Prince called me to him, thrust his arm through mine, and led me out into the garden behind the house.

'My dear Rajah,' said he in a confidential tone, 'I want to have a word with you — a word about Ali.'

The mention of Ali at this moment gave me a small shock of surprise. The Prince, I thought, had subjects of greater importance to give his mind to. But no! I was mistaken, and he proved it by descanting for at least an hour upon the merits of the Camp as an institution for forming the youthful character. 'I want you to explain this to Hari Khan,' he concluded. 'It would be so tiresome if he were to object to Ali's remaining with me. It might lead to all sorts of trouble, you know.'

No doubt I looked rather dubious about my mission, for after a pause he went on: 'It is really rather important that you should bring Hari Khan to see things in their true light — I mean for his own sake. It would be a thousand pities, if a trifling misunderstanding were to throw him into the arms of my brother Salim. We should none of us like to see that!'

The appearance of Mobarek now brought our talk to an end; but, before withdrawing, I received an invitation from Daniyal to join him presently at luncheon. As I followed the servant who had been told to show me to my room, I considered the Prince's last words about Hari. Although spoken lightly, they were more than sufficient to give warning. The subject of Ali had more in it than I had at first realized.

And now I have to record an incident which produced a profoundly disagreeable impression on my mind. As I was going along a corridor on my way to my room, a strange noise came to my ears; the next moment a door in front of me burst open with great violence, and a girl flung herself headlong into the passage. She was evidently running away, but before she could recover her balance a man dashed out after her and succeeded in grabbing hold of her arms. While the two were struggling there before me, I recognized her: — it was Gunevati!

No words can describe my astonishment. I stared, dumbfounded, while a breathless tussle took place. The scene was rendered the more unpleasant by the fact that the man was a young negro. He was trying to drag Gunevati back into the room, but she resisted him with the strength of a maniac. Except for a gasping and panting

and the shuffling of feet, no sound came from either of them. Then Gunevati's eyes chanced to light upon my face, and for an instant she stopped struggling. The man, too, looked up; and in that brief interval Gunevati made an odd sound in her throat. In consternation I called out her name; I was, indeed, about to make some intervention, when the struggle broke out afresh. This time the negro had a firm grip. He picked the girl up bodily from the ground, and lurched through the doorway into the room. I approached and looked in. Near the window, looking sour and annoyed, was a little man whom I recognized, having seen him in the Prince's train not half an hour ago. A big, flat, brown face on the top of a thick, short-legged body gave this fellow the appearance of a large baked crab. I had gathered below that his name was Mansur and that he played a part of some importance in Daniyal's play; but this did not help me to understand what he was doing here at this moment. In his hand were writing materials and something that looked like a school copy-book. The room, I observed, was bare except for a table and two chairs. On one of these the negro now attempted to make Gunevati sit down; but she succeeded in upsetting it, and with a vigorous kick sent it flying across the room. Blinking nervously, and with an expression of disgust, Mansur waddled after the chair and brought it back. This performance was gone through once more before Mansur caught sight of me. With an expressive smile he stood still, shrugged, and threw out his hands. 'You see how it is! It is ridiculous! What can I do?'

I gazed at him in silence. I also looked at Gunevati, who, still pinioned by the negro, was breathing hard and had the same demented look in her eyes. My speechlessness prompted Mansur to say something more.

'The Prince has told me that I am to teach her how to write. But how am I to teach her to write? It is perfectly ridiculous. How can I teach a girl who behaves like that? She is mad.'

He spoke with a strong Persian accent, and from his tone, which was both insolent and querulous, I recognized his type. To the negro he said: 'I wash my hands of the whole business. I shall tell His Royal Highness that ~~she is a~~ dangerous lunatic. Is there a lock on the door?'

He came and examined it. 'Yes. You had better lock her up — and keep watch outside the window as well. Now I have warned you. It is your responsibility, not mine.'

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He joined me outside in the passage, continuing to grumble in the tone of a servant who has been asked to do something outside his usual task. 'I am an actor. It is not my business to be a school-master. Certainly not a schoolmaster for lunatics.' So speaking, he mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief that was strongly perfumed, and adjusted his turban, which, I suspect, Gunevati had recently knocked off. Then, without another word, he walked away.

In the meantime my guide, who had disappeared, returned to me, and was profuse in apologies for having taken me the wrong way. We reached my room without further adventures, and there I fell at once into uneasy speculations. Where had Gunevati come from? How long had she been in the Camp, and what was she doing here? Her presence filled me with the blackest suspicions, — suspicions that attached themselves not only to Daniyal but to Mobarek as well. It looked as if the Prince had gone to the pains of getting hold of Gunevati in order to use her as a witness against Gokal. And Mobarek, who had said nothing to me about Gunevati's presence here, appeared to be party to this.

Next I began puzzling over certain peculiar features of the scene I had just witnessed. Why had Gunevati been so frantic? And, if frantic, why had she struggled dumbly — without crying out? There was something amiss with her that I could not understand. And, finally, why did Daniyal want her to learn to write?

An hour later I went down again and found a luncheon table laid out very simply in the arbour at the end of the garden. We sat down to our meal without any formality. At the head of the table was the Prince, with Mobarek on one side, and I on the other. On my left was Churaman (who arrived breathless just after we had seated ourselves), and on the other side of Mobarek sat a certain Prince Jara.

The conversation that was going on when I came down showed me that Daniyal had agreed — and evidently with the greatest satisfaction — to Mobarek's proposal that *he* should be the one to take the journey to Kathiapur. For the rest, Daniyal had the air of a man who feels he has earned the right to relax. Most of his conversation was addressed to Churaman, who had been superintending a rehearsal, which he, poor man, had been obliged to miss. I had an opportunity of observing how tactfully Mobarek handled his royal protégé, for during the course of the meal there appeared

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from time to time discreet secretaries with papers which they slipped into Mobarek's hands, and Mobarek had to persuade the Prince to run his eye over them before appending his signature.

At first I imagined that the meal would soon be over, for Daniyal ate with negligent haste, almost giving one the impression that he might at any moment get up and walk away. Laughing, drinking, eating, and talking, all at the same time, with his chair tilted back and his eyes sliding from one face to another, he gave an unpleasant impression of restlessness. Twice in the next hour Prince Jara was called upon to get up and parade before him in order to show off some fancy costume. Once it was a cloak that the impersonator of Salim was to wear, and once a robe that Prince Jara himself had designed for a new order of sub-deacons in the Din Ilahi. Taking this poor youth and Churaman as his audience, Daniyal was soon displaying himself at his worst. Not content with Salim as a butt, he fell upon the dignitaries of his father's Court, mocking and disparaging them with a spitefulness that went in excess of anything I should have imagined possible. A group of conscientious, energetic, and for the most part very able men, engaged upon the thankless and difficult task of government, Daniyal sees — or pretends to see — as a collection of stupid, cruel, and ridiculous scoundrels. Occasionally I glanced at Mobarek. His expression betrayed nothing, and I was impressed with a sense of his detachment and power. Without a doubt he despises Daniyal, but I must allow it to be possible that his contempt is qualified by perceptions that I lack.

When at last Churaman and Prince Jara got up and went about their business, the atmosphere very sensibly changed. Daniyal's animation dropped, he became absent-minded, and I felt that his own departure was imminent. Without waste of time, therefore, I described the scene I had witnessed upstairs, and my tone was eloquent of enquiry.

Daniyal and Mobarek exchanged glances; then Daniyal threw back his head and laughed.

'Does your Royal Highness give me leave to explain?' said Mobarek with a smile.

'Of course, my dear Shaik,' replied Daniyal, and he began slicing a mango on his plate.

Mobarek accordingly turned to me, and the story he had to tell relieved my mind of a considerable weight.

'Prince,' he added after a moment, 'the Rajah no doubt finds it

strange that Gunevati should have found the courage — or rather the impertinence — to pour out her tale into your Royal Highness's ears. Have I your permission once more to explain?"

Daniyal shrugged and nodded.

'She is in love with his Royal Highness.' Mobarek made this announcement with a smile. 'Her object in revealing her scandalous relations with Gokal was simply to make herself interesting.'

Daniyal leant back on his chair and wiped his hands delicately on a napkin. I waited. Nothing had been said as yet to throw light on the scene upstairs; but I felt the explanation to be about to come; and I also felt that it was going to be unpleasing.

'Rajah,' said the Prince, 'yesterday — or was it the day before? — word was brought to me that Gunevati's tongue had just been cut out.'

I stared with a frown of horror.

'Someone has cut her tongue out,' the Prince repeated, and he looked me straight in the eyes.

'Someone? Who?'

Daniyal's face darkened and his eyes narrowed. 'Friends of Gokal's perhaps.'

I started back in anger.

'No, no!' interposed Mobarek. 'His Royal Highness does not mean that.'

Daniyal gave a little laugh. 'At any rate her indiscretion was quickly punished, — but by whom?'

I was silent.

'By Salim's spies,' cried Daniyal. 'Who else could have done it?' 'Yes,' he went on, 'Salim's hand is quite plainly to be discerned in this affair. Salim has been moved by fury at the girl's capture and by fear lest she should betray his secrets.'

For some moments after pronouncing these last words, he remained lost in thought, and his expression struck me as particularly disagreeable. Then, coming out of his muse with a shrug, 'That girl,' he exclaimed, 'is really dreadfully foolish, and — what is much more important — a very poor actress. As Lakshmi she merely had to show herself naked on the stage, and that was not beyond her. In my new play I gave her a better part; I had hopes for her; but alas!' He shook his head. 'She is unteachable.'

My reply was a vague murmur. The Prince sighed again, and went on, 'It has come to my ears that she is suspected of having



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been the cause of . . .' A flush slowly spread over his face. 'In fact it has been suggested that she put something into Gokal's food. Can that really be true?'

'I am afraid there is no doubt about it,' I answered.

Again Daniyal's expression became most unpleasant, and, as I looked at him I remembered having noticed that our meal had been served in such a fashion that it would have been impossible to poison him without poisoning the whole lot of us. We had all helped ourselves from one and the same dish, and never had he begun eating until we had almost finished our portions.

After a moment, throwing his napkin down, he began speaking with great vehemence and rapidity. 'A poisoner! Good heavens, what an abominable girl! It is strange how easily women seem to turn to poison. I find such callousness and savagery really beyond conception. Upon my word, she and Salim are very well suited to one another. I think I could do no better than to send her back to him at once.'

After this outburst he fell silent, frowning and drumming his fingers on the table.

'Shaik,' he said at last, 'please send for Mansur. I must have a talk with him. Afterwards I shall perhaps have a few words with the girl herself.'

WE waited for Mansur in silence. I reflected that nothing had been said about Daniyal's reason for wishing Gunevati to be taught how to write, nor about her reason for refusing; but here, at any rate, there was no mystery. Daniyal was obviously annoyed with himself for not having got more information out of the girl while she was still in possession of her tongue; and she, poor thing, was terrified lest acquiring the art of writing should bring further calamity upon her.

Presently, when the servant returned, it was to say that Mansur was nowhere to be found; he seemed to have left the house without a word to anyone. This was an uncomfortable moment for us all, the little actor's unauthorized departure being a piece of unconscionable insolence. A look of extreme rage appeared upon Daniyal's face, but it gave way almost at once to an expression of disgusted boredom. He half closed his eyes, and the next minute, to my surprise, he was actually yawning.

Just as a drug addict is suddenly seized with a craving for his drug, so was he now craving for the stimulus of his noisy, gesticulating crowd. Neither Gunevati nor Salim — no, not the Throne itself! — was of any importance to him for the time being.

'Shaik,' he said carelessly, 'I shall go into this affair later. Just now I really haven't . . .'

He was on the point of getting up, when an agitated secretary was to be seen hurrying over the lawn. 'Your Royal Highness,' the man gasped, 'a terrible calamity has occurred! A letter from His Majesty has been lost! The messenger was swept away in a flood! He is drowned. And the letter to Your Royal Highness has disappeared with him.'

The poor man (it was one of Mobarek's secretaries, not Daniyal's) was quivering with emotion. His eyes moved anxiously from the Prince's face to Mobarek's; he wrung his hands to illustrate his personal sympathy.

But the effect of this news on the Prince was not what he expected. After staring with an unmoved face for half a minute, Daniyal closed his eyes and smiled a beatific smile.

'A calamity indeed!' he pronounced at last. 'Good heavens, to

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think that an inspired message from my august father has been swallowed up by a vulgar mountain-flood! How could Almighty God allow such a thing!’

Mobarek gave a quick frown, and with a gesture bade the confused secretary begone. As for Daniyal, his good-humour had incontinently returned to him. Lying back in his chair, he surveyed Mobarek with a smile of malicious amusement. ‘What do you say to that, Shaik? Could anything be more providential? Without being sure what that letter contained, I shrewdly suspected it was nothing good. But the letter is lost! It is lost! And so all is well.’

Mobarek frowned again, making me think that perhaps I had better retire, to leave him free to remonstrate with Daniyal as he pleased. But at that moment some men and women appeared on the other side of the lawn, and the Prince, when he saw them, jumped up with a cry of delight. To the newcomers, for the moment at least, belonged the centre of the stage, and they took up their parts in approved fashion by launching forth upon a humorous account of their journey. In the interests of facetiousness all verisimilitude was sacrificed; but that did not matter, as the conversation was merely an exhibition in the art of creating social appearances; — nothing mattered except that there should be the requisite amount of noise and laughter. This fashion of acting up to an agreed standard of elegance is to my mind a very tiresome business. It is this, precisely, which on a lower social level produces the genteel. Of course in Daniyal’s group just the opposite effect is created. Here the genteel is given altogether too wide a berth; you are reminded of it by its opposite — a naturalness too good to be true, an exaggerated *sans-gêne*, a daring which pretends to be unaware of itself. What is this, if not a double-distilled vulgarity? Indeed, it seems to me that just as it takes all the cleverness of a clever man to make the perfect fool, so it is the special privilege of the sophisticated that they alone are able to produce vulgarity’s richest, rarest fruits.

But here I must check myself, for without a doubt I am becoming uncharitable. The fact is that, after living for several months in seclusion, I am not in the best humour for company. I should remember, too, that my nature is lacking in geniality. Nor is this fault easily corrected. In order to be genial it is not enough to be willing — nay, anxious — to overlook other people’s shortcomings; more important is it to be unaware of one’s own. Nothing makes

others more uneasy than to feel that their companion is self-critical. A great deal can be forgiven to the fatuous.

But to return to my narrative. Prince Jara and Churaman now joined us, and the company settled down to discuss with much gusto the jealousies of Daniyal's friends who had not been invited to the Camp. From this they went on to the moral indignation which the Camp aroused in the ranks of the prudes and philistines; they scoffed at the bad taste of everyone except themselves, — in particular at the badness of the art which was receiving official patronage. Daniyal was witty about the costliness and ugliness of Fatehpur-Sikri. 'God, in destroying it,' said he, 'has agreeably surprised me by showing that His taste is at any rate a little better than my father's.'

From this it was an easy step to the Emperor's lost letter, and he was making the most of it as a subject for humour, when Mobarek's secretary — the same that had appeared before — once more came over the lawn; and again, poor creature, he looked very unhappy in his mission.

'Your Royal Highness . . .' he began timidly.

'Well?' said Daniyal, impatient at being interrupted.

'Your Royal Highness — the letter . . .'

'Well!' said Daniyal again.

'It — it has been recovered. Forgive me, Your Royal Highness, I have it here.'

This time the joke was against Daniyal, but he carried the situation off not too badly. Throwing the letter down on the table, he eyed it with an expressive grimace; then, turning to Mobarek — 'Shaik,' he said, 'in spite of all evidence to the contrary, this letter has *not* been recovered! Believe me, what you see here is nothing but a poor ghost! The letter remains lost, lost! By heaven, I am not to be cheated so easily out of that convenient flood.'

While the company laughed their approval, Daniyal picked the letter up again, tossed it into the air and caught it with the dexterity of a juggler; then he examined the great blue seal. 'I think I shall open it,' he said carelessly; 'it will be interesting to see . . .'

If he had half intended — and I am inclined to think he had — to read the letter aloud, this intention was quickly changed. I noticed his face darken as his eyes skimmed the lines; evidently the Emperor's letter contained matters graver than any he had expected. After a moment he thrust it into his pocket and broke out into an

indignant tirade. What it was exactly that so outraged his feelings we were not told, but the sympathy of his audience was not the less prompt, nor their cries the less loud, for that. Persiflage and cynicism disappeared, submerged for the time being under a wave of fine moral indignation. I confess this took me aback. These people had given me to understand that moral indignation was a silliness characteristic of the philistine. Besides, who would have expected that those who spent so much time in trying to wound the feelings of others, would be so unreasonable as to cry out when their own susceptibilities were hurt?

Long evening shadows were stretching over the grass before Daniyal made a move, and then it was only to drag us after him to his theatre. Yes, busy as he knew Mobarek to be, he kept him — and me — dawdling about in his theatre for nearly two hours more, while fitful, muddled attempts were being made to rehearse certain fragments of his play. Truly the worldly life calls for a self-discipline which the common man may well be thankful to escape. More especially as this discipline is often petty in intention and act. The world is too much like a theatre, where, in order to look lordly and bear yourself with pride, you have to give all your private time to the painting of your face, to dressing up, and posturing before a looking-glass. You are obliged to learn to think first and foremost of appearances; you must unceasingly project yourself into the mind of your audience; and, as you learn how simple and few are the tricks that eternally impose, you become proud of your small clevernesses, and forget how small they are. Nevertheless, I do not accuse Mobarek of having yet parted with his dignity. Cynical he no doubt is, but that without meanness.

The Prince was now completely in his element, alternately shouting directions to the actors and exchanging witticisms with his friends. Such was the position when a dramatic incident took place.

A man whom I recognized as the sham suicide, Prince Dantawat, walked slowly down the empty theatre and went up to the Prince in an endeavour to engage his attention; but Daniyal was talking eagerly to someone on the stage, and when at length he did turn to the poor wretch at his side, it was simply to wave him away. Dantawat, looking the picture of dejection, then walked slowly back again, but on reaching me he paused. 'I think I know you,' he said.

I replied as pleasantly as I could, for he excited my pity. There

was a look in his eyes which made me think that his troubles must have affected his brain.

'Do you see that man?' Dantawat went on, still more strangely, and he pointed at Daniyal, who was standing about fifteen paces away. I turned my head, and, as I did so, the fellow put his other hand to my sword, snatched it out of its scabbard, and ran towards the Prince. But I also sprang forward, and reached Dantawat just in time to push him on the shoulder, so that he reeled to one side. Daniyal, whose back was turned, saw none of this, nor did those beside him, who were also facing the stage. Many others, however, scattered about the theatre, witnessed the whole incident, and at once a tremendous clamour arose, and a rush was made towards Dantawat. It is significant that, when seized, he offered no resistance, but stood quiet, seemingly unaware of what he had just done.

Now, leaving the question of Dantawat's sanity aside, the point arises: did he really intend to kill the Prince, or was he merely making a dramatic gesture, not unlike his sham attempts to drown himself in the lake? This is the matter that directly concerns me, because on it hangs the question whether I must be regarded as having saved Daniyal's life. It is my firm conviction that Dantawat was not in earnest, and it is extremely annoying to me to be looked upon as Daniyal's saviour. Yet that is the view that has been generally adopted, and I have been powerless to alter it. The situation, immediately after the incident, passed entirely out of my control, and out of Daniyal's too. It was the crowd of noisy, foolish, irresponsible onlookers who determined the significance of what had occurred, and they of course were governed by no other desire than to make the affair as sensational as possible. I blush with shame and disgust when I recall the ridiculous scene in which Daniyal and I had perforce to play the leading parts. In Daniyal's exoneration let it be said that I believe he was secretly almost as much annoyed as I. But he lacked the courage to take what might have appeared an ungenerous attitude. Being called upon to regard himself as having narrowly escaped death, and to hail me as his saviour, he accepted the proffered rôle. From that instant the worst was to be expected; and indeed it did occur. First of all of course the Prince made an exhibition of sang-froid (perfect composure enlivened by light humorous sallies); then came gracious forgiveness and a compassionate regard for his assailant; next a hushing of the

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hysterical emotions of his adoring friends; and last but not least — a proper acknowledgment, a generous recognition, of my glorious part in the affair. As a climax — I shudder in recording it — he gave me a public accolade, an embrace — a kiss!

It was not long after sunrise the next day that Mobarek and I started on our journey. We travelled comfortably in a double palanquin, which was borne by eight men. The road was wet and slippery, our pace slow, and the cold unusual for this season. Mobarek, however, was wrapped in furs, and as for me, I have become accustomed to the rigours of this mountain climate.

I made the most of the occasion by discussing the attitude taken up by Gokal towards the Din Ilahi. Mobarek said that from members of the Brahmin caste the Emperor would require no more than that they should declare themselves not in opposition to the faith, and should not discourage the lower castes from joining. I answered that no self-respecting Brahmin could do otherwise than discourage a man from pronouncing the words: 'I . . . do utterly and entirely renounce and repudiate the religion . . . which I have seen and heard of my fathers, and do embrace the Din Ilahi of Akbar Shah, and do accept the four grades of entire devotion, to wit, sacrifice of property, life, honour, *and religion*.'

After a long argument we broke off without reaching agreement, but I am left with the presentiment that Mobarek will advise the Emperor to make very important concessions.

About midday we met a messenger on the way up to the Camp, and a bunch of letters was handed to Mobarek. 'Ha!' he exclaimed, 'this is from the Khan.' And a moment later with an air of great satisfaction he turned to me to say: 'Rajah, I have good news. The Khan has been delayed by the rains and will not reach Kathiapur for several days yet. This means that instead of hurrying, we can continue our journey in a leisurely way.'

An hour later we arrived at our first halt, which was a pavilion in the woods built by Daniyal for his coming and going guests. The sun was now shining in a clear sky; the trees sparkled with rain-drops; and on all sides the flowers of the pink rhododendron carpeted the ground. Here one could enjoy to the full the quiet and freshness which the Camp so noticeably lacks.

While we were at our midday meal a runner arrived with a hasty



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note from Daniyal. As he read it Mobarek began to smile. 'The Prince tells me that another letter from his father reached him this morning, soon after we had left. In order to avoid the appearance of having received it, he is going off at once on a hunting expedition into the hills behind the Camp. The Emperor's previous letter, which we have to regard as lost, contained, as you probably have guessed, orders that he should cancel his coming fête. The Prince suspects that this fresh letter repeats those commands. So he is off at once, nor will he return until the day before the festivities are planned to begin. 'For by that time,' he writes, 'it will be too late to stop anything. And mind you bring Lalita with you; for then I shall be able to say that it was impossible *on her account* to change our programme.'

We both laughed.

A little later Mobarek began talking to me about a certain European, Smiss, or Smish, whom we are likely soon to meet, as he is on his way up to the Camp. Unlike any of the Westerners that I have yet come across this man is an Englishman — and not a Jesuit. The object of his journey is to study the religious thought of the East. He has been visiting China and Japan, and intends to make a sojourn of some months in India on his way back to England. In his desire to learn he offers a pleasing contrast to the Jesuits, who come here exclusively to teach. Smiss, I think, must be an interesting man, and I am glad I shall have this opportunity of talking to him. He has already spent a few weeks at the Imperial Court, where Mobarek met him but did not have the leisure — or, possibly, the inclination — to cultivate his acquaintance. My impression is that Daniyal, who has also met Smiss, and who is always ready to pick up new ideas, may have been influenced by this European in directions which Mobarek considers undesirable. At any rate Mobarek speaks of Smiss, and of Daniyal's interest in Smiss, in a tone of disdain.

Early in the afternoon rain began to fall heavily, and we resigned ourselves, not at all unwillingly, to the prospect of spending the night here. I rejoice in my absence from the Camp. A day and a night there were enough to fill me with a weariness, which was not of the body, nor of the mind, but of the spirit itself. In the midst of the downpour two trains of bedraggled ladies and gentlemen arrived. Despite the cold and wet they were in high spirits, for an invitation

to the Prince's festival is a highly valued distinction. When we told them that they could not expect to meet Daniyal himself for another week, they were slightly discouraged; however, bravely disregarding the weather, they pushed on.

A little later there appeared, all by himself, the Englishman, Smith (This he tells me is the correct rendering of his curious European name.) It was remarkable to see him plodding along on foot, regardless of the rain and cold. I suppose he is accustomed to severe weather in his own country. I gave orders that he should receive every attention; and a little later, after his carriers had arrived and he had changed his clothes, we met in the common guest-room. Smith is a man of about forty-five, obviously belonging to the caste of pundits. He has the slight and stooping frame, the peering eyes and anxious expression of those whose pursuit of learning is inclined to be intemperate. Rather peculiar is his habit of fidgeting all the time he talks. Instead of the black cloth of the Jesuits he wears a grey costume of fine texture, but somewhat awkward cut. In address he is friendly, uncertain, and inquiring; — on the whole a not unpleasing personality.

We had the room to ourselves, for Mobarek was as usual dictating to his secretaries. One on each side of the brazier, we eyed each other with a not unsympathetic curiosity, and very soon the conversation became interesting. Smith won my regard at once by saying that he conceived the dominant note of India to be religion — a characteristic, he added, in which this country contrasted markedly with China. In order to show him where he stood with me, I lost no time in telling him that I was a Buddhist. His reply was that he venerated Buddha, Christ, and Socrates above all other men. This showed me that he was not a Christian, an inference which he himself presently confirmed with a good deal of emphasis. I also gathered that he is positively hostile to the Jesuits on account of their intolerance and the cruelties into which it leads them. Circumstances have forced him into the company of Acquaviva and Monserrate during the last few months; and I could see that he had conceived a dislike of both these gentlemen, but of Acquaviva in particular. He was soon questioning me about Buddhism, and I was happy to dispel some of the mistaken ideas that he had derived from the puerile Mahayana forms of the faith. He spoke with great appreciation of the beauty of the ritual in China and Japan, the amenity of the temples and their gardens,

and the atmosphere of serene benignity which the priesthood respired. All this is very well, but of the eternal verities enshrined in the teaching of the Enlightened One he has, I regret to say, learned practically nothing.

Whilst we were talking Mobarek came in. His manner to Smith was, I thought, slightly wanting in cordiality; but this, I hope, Smith did not perceive. After our guest had retired, Mobarek said: 'Daniyal has asked me to persuade this European friend of his to return to Kathiapur with us. He has some reason for not wishing him to arrive at the Camp before he is back there himself.'

I expressed myself not displeased, since Smith struck me as a pleasant and intelligent man.

'Possibly,' replied Mobarek, 'but he holds very undesirable opinions. In his own country he is not much considered.'

'How do you know?' I inquired.

'I have it from Acquaviva.'

Here is an example of prejudice. Mobarek respects Acquaviva because he is of ancient lineage, being in fact the son of the Duke of Atri, one of the most influential nobles in the Kingdom of Naples, whilst the family of Smith is, I understand, not noble, although large and highly respected. Acquaviva and Smith are not on good terms, and Mobarek has accepted Acquaviva's account of the man, much of which is probably inaccurate. I cannot believe, for instance, that Smith really endorses the Nastika dictum: 'There is nothing superior to fish, flesh, wine, copulation, and ritual,' — although, in a moment of antagonism against the sombrely ascetic Acquaviva, he may have said so by way of a jest.

Here is a late entry before retiring for the night. I continue to like Smith, but he puzzles me increasingly. Our talk this evening before withdrawing to our rooms was about the Greeks and their view of life. The topic was introduced by Smith, who showed himself highly appreciative of all that was gracious and intelligent in that brief civilization. 'The Greeks,' he said, 'discovered, first among men, the difficult art of enjoying the best things of life. They seem to have been without fear and without a sense of guilt. In Europe to-day a sense of guilt, consciously or only half-consciously felt, hangs over practically everyone. What but that has given the Jesuits their power? However,' he went on, 'the sombre religion of Ignatius Loyola will certainly not prevail. It is fundamentally unsuited to the spirit of Europe.'

Presently in answer to a question of mine, he continued: 'In India I am not conscious of this sense of guilt, but I must confess that here a primitive fear inspired by the forces of Nature does seem to me to pervade the ordinary man's religion. The Greeks freed themselves from this fear by humanizing Nature. The gods were conceived as being of a nature akin to ours. His religion helped the Greek to feel himself at home in the world.'

'In India,' I replied, 'Nature is sterner and more terrible than in Greece. Our primitive ancestors were animists like the Greeks. They made gods of the natural forces; in our Rigveda you will find them; but those gods are awe-inspiring; they are not brought down to human stature. Our race has always been less happy than were the boyish Greeks. But an unhappy childhood is in some respects advantageous. It teaches one to grow up. Our people have been forced to look overhead into the immensities and down into the profundities, which the Greeks managed to ignore.'

At these words of mine, Smith, I remember, fidgeted most uncomfortably. 'I don't think fear has ever borne good fruit,' he protested. 'I look upon the progress of the human race as a gradual emancipation from terrors — often imaginary. Religion has too often been the vehicle of superstition, a cause of intolerance, and an excuse for fiendish cruelties. But the Greek by *his* religion was made a good citizen and a reasonable man. It taught him how to enjoy the best things in life and made him at home in the world.'

'It made him feel at home on earth,' I replied, 'at the cost of ignoring the universe. Do you not agree with me that in their escape from fear the Greeks left behind something of the utmost value to the spirit of man? Something which leads the spirit forth out of aestheticism and intellectualism into a true maturity.'

'I don't think I quite follow you,' said Smith, eyeing me coldly.

'Well, let me remind you that one of your own philosophers has said: "All knowledge begins and ends in wonder; but the wonder that is the child of ignorance must be replaced by the wonder that is the parent of adoration." The Greeks had a lively intellectual curiosity, but little capacity for wonder or adoration.'

'If you mean that the Greeks eschewed metaphysics,' replied Smith, 'I certainly agree with you, but to my mind they were wise in so doing. The grandiose abstractions in which the Indian mind delights had no appeal for them. Yet you can hardly reproach them with superficiality! If you cannot attach value to their mastery of

the technique of living, consider their philosophy and their art!’

Anxious that we should not sink deeper into disagreement, I took refuge in silence, and Smith presently resumed speech. ‘The Greeks turned away from metaphysics,’ he repeated with firmness, ‘and in so doing I think they were not unwise. You, as a Buddhist, will surely not differ with me here. Buddha was pre-eminently a realist and a rationalist. In the pure form of Buddhism which you profess, all superstition is rigorously rejected. Indeed you yourself have told me that nearly all speculation on metaphysical or cosmological subjects is forbidden as mischievous.’ Thus speaking, Smith fixed a persuasive look upon me through his glasses, and, as I still remained silent, he went on: ‘Guided by an inborn common sense, the Greeks excluded from their religion all futile and dangerous elements. Thus they lived wisely and happily, shut in from the abyss.’

At this point we were interrupted, nor was it too soon, for I was beginning to feel bewildered by what appeared to me to be a wilful superficiality on the part of Smith. I could not make him out. Here was a man whose appearance proclaimed him a pundit; he had, moreover, undertaken an arduous journey for the sake of gathering religious information, and in our earlier talk he had shown what appeared to be a genuine respect for the Indian mind. ‘The Hindu,’ he had said, ‘does, I am sure, really believe that the true life is a spiritual life.’ But since then what had he done? He had persistently extolled a temper of mind quite different from — indeed contrary to — ours. It almost looks as if he thought it better to be humanistic after the fashion of the Greek, than religious in the fashion of the Indian.

THIS morning I had another talk with Smith, but it has done little to clear my mind. We began with a discussion of Christianity, which was started by some remark of mine about Sita and her view of the Buddhist faith. Oddly enough, it was not long before I found myself engaged in a defence of Sita's religion — a change of sides for me, as my part until to-day has always been that of objector. But I have been a sympathetic objector, whereas Smith is quite the reverse. The hostile gleam that came into his eyes as he denounced the faith of his fathers took me aback at the time, and I cannot recall it now without astonishment. I am certain that Smith is one of the most kindly-intentioned of men, yet he nourishes his prejudices with the milk of hatred. The fact is that with sixteen centuries of Christianity behind him, to say nothing of a Christian upbringing, he has become incapable of taking an impartial view, or even of realizing that his view is lacking in impartiality. Just as he might have become a fighting bigot, so he has actually become a fighting apostate. Could he but read the New Testament in the same spirit in which he reads his Plato, it would move him to the profoundest depths of his being — just as it did me, when I first read it. Could he but consider the character of Christ as he has considered that of Socrates, he would be overwhelmed by its beauty. But this is quite beyond him; and, if he is prone to associate the names of Christ, Socrates, and Buddha, that is done, I fear, not with any intention of honouring Christ but rather in order to bring him down from the unique position that Christians assign to him. As I listened to Smith I began to understand better his praise of the pagan view of life. Alas, how often do we not discover that an enthusiasm which at first sight appears generous is but the obverse aspect of some private and petty antagonism. It was not long before Smith was insidiously suggesting to me that Socrates and Buddha had much in common, and that what they had in common made them much the superiors of Christ. Buddha and the Greeks, said he, were at one in rejecting dogma and deprecating all metaphysical vapourings.

'It is undeniable,' I replied, 'that Buddha was impatient of questions, which, when once the truth has been grasped, reveal themselves as meaningless, nor do I want to deny that his austere realism

contrasts strikingly with the sprawling unrestraint of much speculative Hinduism. But the difference between the most undisciplined Hindu and the most disciplined Buddhist is as nothing compared to the distance that lies between the Indian and the Greek. The Indian, be he an illiterate Hindu peasant or an erudite Buddhist recluse, lives in an unceasing consciousness of the immensities around him, and this consciousness is intimately bound up with the conviction that (to use your own words) "the true life is the spiritual life". Unlike the Greek, he has never striven "to make himself at home in the world". Buddhism has shown, it is true, that the accomplished Arahat may attain to a state of bliss in this world, but that bliss is not *of* this world; it arises out of a sense of deliverance from it. — To my mind,' I went on, 'one might almost say that Christ stands for the heart, Socrates for the reason, and Buddha for the spirit, in man; and while the heart, unsupported, is childlike, and the reason, in isolation, is puerile, the spirit by its own proper nature moves towards a maturity, which is, in fact, a gradual apprehension of the eternal verities or spiritual truth. I can perceive, but I do not feel, the charm of the Greeks; it is too often boyish and immature; and Plato, I confess, sometimes seems to me nasty, priggish and smug. You, yourself,' I reminded Smith, 'have said of the Greeks that by their religion they were "shut in from the abyss". Your words are true. The Greeks cultivated a little of civilization, they evolved a small but exquisite culture, at the price of ignoring the immensities in the midst of which men live. But to ignore metaphysical problems is not to abolish them; and in a sense it may be said that every man who thinks at all is, willy-nilly, a metaphysician. I mean that there are metaphysical assumptions at the back of every one of his thoughts. The Greek liked to think of himself as a member of a city community, but his city was, none the less, a point upon the wandering earth, and the earth is a point in the universe, and every part of the universe partakes of the metaphysical mystery of its being.

'However, to return to Christianity,' I went on, 'what I am going to say about it now may cause you some surprise, as coming from the lips of a Buddhist, but please do not think that I am trying to gloze over the opposition between the Christian and the Buddhist attitudes of mind. My point is rather that Buddhism, Christianity, and the Hellenic view of life are all utterly different. The opposition between Christ and Buddha is sufficiently stated when I remind you that the latter was insistent upon the absolute necessity of banishing

from the mind the ideas of God, the soul, and immortality. Let us turn rather to the contrast between the figures of Christ and Socrates. One of my reasons for holding, as I do, that the first towers above the second is this: the Greek spoke primarily as one to whom the only means of discovering the truth about the world as a whole and man's position in it, were the means provided by the reasoning mind of man. The Jew addressed himself to men's intuitions and spoke in the language of inspiration. It is this that has given Christ's utterances their unexampled power. Such power the reason will never command, nor is it desirable in my opinion that it should.'

As Smith listened to me, I could detect a stiffening of his whole being. 'Well!' he said at last, 'we have reached, I am afraid, a core of fundamental disagreement. I believe in goodwill guided by reason; intuitions I hold to be very dangerous guides, and an appeal to them is not easily distinguishable from an appeal to blind prejudice. Prejudice means unreason, and unreason is responsible for most of the cruelties and follies of mankind.'

'I don't mind admitting,' I said after a pause, 'that Christian morality requires Christian dogma to support it. But does not every system of ethics require support either from intuitions, which you mistrust, or from metaphysics which you eschew, or from dogma which you will not allow?'

As Smith remained silent, I went on: 'The Christian conception of God as a loving father, intimately near to each human soul, is to my mind a beautiful one. Very beautiful, too, is the idea of an incarnate God suffering death for the redemption of the human race — and as an example to it. Christianity gives brotherhood to men, and value to every human life. In the place of the Pagan view of the time-process as an eternal repetition, it introduces the idea of an end in perfection at last. I ask you: was it not the dryness and sterility of Greek thought that led to the expansion of the later Greek mystery-religions? The freshness, the hope, the tenderness, the courage, of Christianity — these are what I value; but when I have said that, I must add: I am not a Christian; I am a Buddhist.'

I was sorry to see Smith withdrawing into himself, but I could not refrain from speaking thus. We looked at one another in silence and my companion's face told me that he was as much puzzled by me as I by him.

At noon we resumed our journey, Mobarek, Smith and I; and, as we travelled in separate palanquins, I had plenty of time for



reflection. I soon saw what it was that had most deeply alienated Smith. There is no doubt that the word 'reason' has for him associations and a meaning that it does not have for me. On the other hand the word 'intuition' fills him with mistrust and dislike. The reason he regards as sacrosanct, just as Daniyal does 'Art'. We all of us hold something sacred, even the cynic, to whom his cynicism is holy. Next, I must bear in mind that the European is generally imbued with a sense of the value and reality of the phenomenal world in and for itself. To him the affairs of this earth have an importance on their own account. Neither Christian nor unbeliever knows anything about reincarnation. For the Christian the soul of the individual is somehow generated on this earth and continues in heaven, its place through eternity being assigned to it by the individual's behaviour in this one short life. To us such a doctrine is so fantastically childish in its want of perspective that it is difficult to keep it in mind when talking to Christians. To the European of an agnostic turn of mind (and it appears that Smith is one), the individual as a temporary psychic unity comes into being at birth, and ceases to exist after death. The lifetime of an individual on this earth is consequently of supreme importance to him in and for itself, for there is no higher significance to which to relate it. But, unless one holds that mind is merely a function of matter, the birth of a mind is not explicable as a mere process of cell development, so I begin to fear that Smith is a materialist, and afflicted with all the intellectual and moral obtuseness of materialists. Yet I am certain that he does not wish to be regarded in this light; he talks about 'spirituality' and 'religion' as if these words had an idealistic significance for him. Lastly I must bear in mind that certain peculiarities of Smith's find their excuse in the belief that for each individual one single life-experience is all in all. It goes a long way to account for his equalitarian ideas, to say nothing of his neurotic pre-occupation with intolerance, cruelty, and physical pain. To put himself into the mental position of such a man is almost impossible for an Indian; indeed, I shudder when I reflect how appalling this world must seem to him. I can hardly understand how one so kindly and sensitive as he is can retain his sanity at all. What a ghastly spiritual bankruptcy awaits those unfortunate Christians who lose their faith! Completely devoid of a true understanding of the moral and spiritual order of the universe, they are like children thrown out of the nursery into a wilderness.

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How truly thankful I am that Sita's faith is impregnable, for that it surely is. I am glad, too, that although I have presented my views to her and criticized her belief, I have never attempted to undermine it. Sita's mind is distinctly of the European cast; she would find much in Smith that is sympathetic to her in spite of his rejection of Christianity. Even for Sita man is at the centre of the universe; God, in the last analysis, is postulated by her as necessary to man. She cannot understand the Indian way of placing the Absolute at the centre, and regarding the whole history of mankind from first to last as nothing but a ripple upon the surface of that Supreme Mind.

I have been reflecting sadly upon my failure to render the Indian point of view intelligible to her, and I blame myself for it. Contact with the Western mind, as represented by Smith, has had a disturbing effect upon me. It shows me too well how, from every other angle except that at which we Indians stand, my present intention soon to withdraw from the world must appear selfish, and this moment singularly ill-chosen. India is on the verge of civil war; I am needed in my capacity of ruler; my wife and son require guidance, and my best friend — the man upon whom I rely to give them guidance — is in danger of falling into disgrace. Of course my hope is that by the end of the next few weeks the basis for an agreement between Gokal and Mobarek will have been found, and that I shall have determined upon the proper course for my successors in government. Yes, that is my hope; but, alas, it is already weakening.

uncomfortable; but I think this discomfort was largely anger, which a just suspicion of Mobarek's object provoked.

'Being neither a Moslem nor a Hindu,' he said coldly, 'religious fanaticism will pass me by. Foreigners are probably safer than anyone else.'

'Do you think so?' returned Mobarek suavely. 'Well, I hope you are right.'

Smith smiled. 'I am not even a Christian. Why should I be singled out for assassination?'

'Because,' replied Mobarek, 'to the religious-minded there is nothing more odious than irreligion.'

Smith did not answer, and in order to fill up an awkward silence I made the remark that Moslems ought properly to feel less hostile to Christianity than to other religions, for not only had they recognized Christ as a Prophet, but they accepted the Virgin Birth, and the Second Advent. And Christians, on their side, should look upon Islam rather as a Christian heresy than as an altogether alien religion.

Our choice of a halting-place this evening was not a happy one, even if the proximity of the corpse be left out of account. The place abounds in horse-flies; and, although these creatures have given little trouble to Mobarek or me, they have persecuted the unfortunate Smith. It is on them that I fix the responsibility for a serious blunder on the part of our guest. Overlooking the fact that Mobarek, although not a Mahommedan, has many attachments to Islam, he began talking with scant respect about that faith. I suppose he was not obviously at fault, for, as he afterwards pointed out to me, Mobarek, besides being conspicuously at enmity with that doughty champion of Islam, Prince Salim, is himself the foster-father of quite another religion. But the real point of the matter is that in attacking Islam Smith let it be seen that he was inimical to religion in general, or — if this is saying too much — inimical to all forms of God-worship. I think that there is no doubt that Mobarek did not err in finding this spirit behind his contemptuous remarks. They were followed by a silence, and I hoped that Mobarek had not heard them (for Smith has a trick of muttering, as it were, to himself), or that his attention had been elsewhere. But the next moment the camp-fire flared up, and upon Mobarek's face I saw a look that I can only describe as satanic. It made me feel that perhaps Smith had better not tarry in India too long.

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It has been said that human affinities and antipathies are determined very largely by the sense of smell, although those concerned may well be unaware of it. In my opinion even more important is the religious sense, even when differences of religious disposition are felt rather than expressed. In the relations ruling between Mobarek, Smith, and me such differences have not remained hidden. They have acted disastrously between Smith and Mobarek, while Smith and I have succeeded in remaining friendly only by the exercise of forbearance.

My forbearance this evening did, I confess, nearly fail, when Smith again began praising the cheerful, good-humoured, matter-of-fact temper of the Chinese, who, he says, are like his own countrymen in never doubting that an enlightened sociality is all-in-all. Similarly, he finds the Japanese less alien to him than we are, and he even hinted that the Negro is more sympathetic. He is determined to make out that between the European and the Hindu there is a profound difference in spiritual outlook. His argument is that while the European believes that life in this world is, or should be, a good in itself, the Indian has always held it to be an evil, from the everlasting recurrence of which he aspires to escape.

Now this is only looking at the surface of things.<sup>1</sup> In the first place the Hindu, in common with all men, instinctively clings to life, and instinctively seeks pleasure and happiness while alive. It is only in his capacity as a thinker that he proclaims life evil; and if the European were capable of an equal philosophic detachment he would inevitably come to the same conclusion.

Why does the European fail in detachment? The cause is the difference of temperament — engendered to some extent no doubt by different geographical conditions. In a cold, even in a temperate, climate bodily exertion is pleasanter and more natural than in the tropics, and, unlike exertion in the tropics, it produces an agreeable fatigue and an increased capacity for exertion. A habit of body and mind is thus set up which directs a man's attention outwards and attaches his thoughts to material things. And, because man is a self-explaining, self-justifying animal, men whose minds are thus oriented will adopt a philosophy or view of life which makes their behaviour seem right and reasonable in their own eyes. That the European lives as he does *because* he finds life good, is simply not

<sup>1</sup> Here Rajah Amar expounds his own views, which, as he uses some three thousand words, I have decided to abbreviate.

true; it is because he lives as he does that he persuades himself that life is good.

The Indian is not thus deluded. He recognizes that life is appetition, and that appetition is unrest, anxiety, pain, and sorrow. Christianity by urging that the appetitive impulse should be directed to the benefit of others, does much to redeem it; and it is in Christianity of course that the truly religious spirit of Europe has manifested itself. It is absurd of Smith to maintain that Christianity is opposed to the spirit of Europe, when historical evidences are so overwhelmingly against him. It is idle to put forward that Europe has never adopted Christian practice, although Christian precept has been professed. No race, no society, has ever yet succeeded in living up to its religious principles, — the Hindu no more than the European. The difference between us is not one of religiousness but of spiritual insight.

I tried to persuade Smith of this, and ended up by saying: 'I believe the Westerner to mistake his own values, his own incentive, his own meaning. His mistake will very likely be of considerable value to mankind, because in his wanderings he may well find much that is of cultural utility. It is important, perhaps, that a part should go astray for the sake of the whole. I am very ready to admit that your preoccupation with material things has developed your practical reason far beyond ours. Christianity, too, has developed your hearts. It is now time that you developed the spirit that is in you. The reason and the heart both speak a simpler language than that of the spirit. In one of our earlier talks I said that Buddha addressed himself primarily to the spirit in man. I wish I could persuade you to study Buddhism, for then you would see what I mean.'

YESTERDAY we met two or three parties of Daniyal's guests on their way up to the Camp, and I was amused (perhaps also a little annoyed) by the greetings I received. These people showed me by their manner that news of the Dantawat incident had reached them; they imagined that I had been staying with Daniyal in the Camp, that I was a close friend of his, and that I was now standing very high in his favour. They accordingly hailed me effusively and treated me as one of themselves. It devolved upon me to undeceive them; and to do this quickly, effectively, and without producing embarrassment, has not always been an easy task.

An interesting light has been thrown upon Smith and his relations with Daniyal by the manner in which these people have greeted *him*. Not only have they been very polite, giving him the consideration regarded as due to one who has been taken up by the Prince, but they have also been at great pains to display themselves as intellectuals. Evidently Smith has some reputation as a thinker; and Daniyal's patronage of him has, I fancy, served to fortify his own claim to intellectuality, while at the same time making intellectuality itself more fashionable.

It has been interesting, too, to observe Smith's attitude towards these young and fashionable friends of Daniyal's, whose attempts at 'intellectual' conversation have been slightly disconcerting. He showed himself anxious to think well of them, and I soon began to understand what kind of picture he had formed of the Prince's aesthetic coterie. I remembered some things he had said to me at our first meeting, and, whereas they had only bewildered me at the time, I now found them quite illuminating. Speaking of the festivals in ancient Greece, when beautiful youths, flower-crowned, disported themselves in the Palaestra, he confided to me how greatly he was looking forward to the festivities at the Camp. 'I should not be sorry,' he said, 'to witness scenes of a slightly abandoned jollity.' I remember having been uncertain what to reply to this, for I, on my side, had had preconceived notions about Smith; so that I wondered whether I ought not to prepare him for disappointment — or worse. Well, since then my conception of this strange European has altered: I am now quite ready to let Smith make what he can of

Daniyal and his friends. After all, people only see what they want to see; and Smith is not likely to be fastidious — or over-fastidious — in just the same manner as I. Certainly, what I call spiritual vulgarity often passes without giving offence and even without being noticed.

What, I ask myself, is the innate intellectual and moral taste of my friend Smith? The fact that he is already so friendly disposed to Daniyal confuses my judgment. On reaching middle-age men of a certain type are apt to make a private — and sometimes an almost unconscious — resolution that they will keep their minds open to the appreciations and enthusiasms of youth. They are anxious to win approval — their own approval possibly, as well as that of others — by remaining in touch with the young. Such men are wanting in loyalty to themselves and their life-experience. A determination to see and feel as their juniors do falsifies their judgments, and opens the road to a general intellectual snobbery. A man must be true to his own taste — yes, even when he is able to conceive that it may be limited or bad. And this loyalty is even more important in the moral sphere than in the aesthetic. There are faults more serious than an honest narrow-mindedness.

This train of thought was introduced by the events of the evening, when a party of strolling players gave us an insignificant and tawdry entertainment. Their performance in one respect was, in fact, positively displeasing, inasmuch as they distorted and vulgarized the ancient and highly significant mystery-play that was part of their programme. Some of Daniyal's friends, who were camping beside us, derived from the entertainment a pleasure largely made up of amusement — the kind of pleasure which the sophisticated take in a simplicity that flatters their sense of superiority. Taking his cue from them Smith worked up an enthusiasm which I cannot but regard as factitious. It would be unfair perhaps to say of this enthusiasm that it rested wholly on self-deception and aesthetic snobbery, because Smith was after all looking at the performance through the eyes of an ignorant foreigner, and he could not see in what respects it was commonplace and merely bad; but in associating himself with Daniyal's friends in their eulogies of the play he was certainly wanting in intellectual honesty.

Later, when all was quiet again, he and I walked down the bare spur of a hill to a point from which we could look out over the plains. The night had been dark, but now the moon, which was nearly

full, came out and hung above the low mists that lay like a sea beneath us. That ghostly sea was ruddy as if dust and mist were mixed up together; and it foamed against the globe of the reddening moon as she sank. Spectral and lurid she sank, and all that region of the sky about her became the scene of a silent symbolic tragedy.

We neither of us spoke; and I imagined that Smith felt the beauty of that spectacle as much as I. But, after a few minutes, as we were walking back again, he broke out once more into praise of the play and the players.

I was wise enough to make no definite response, but here I may as well express my true feelings: I was seized with contemptuous irritation. Perhaps, too, I should do well to make a more general declaration. Let me admit that I have no leanings towards Art — not even the art of letters — although I have dabbled in literature from very early years. Now, when I write, my words are the simplest expression of my thought — and nothing more. If I correct what I have written, it is in no spirit of vanity, but simply in order to remove redundances, to give a sharper outline to what is vague, and above all to make sure that my pen has not swerved from the truth. Of course, in order to communicate one's meaning in the fullest sense of the word, one must convey the feeling that accompanies one's thought — for thought and feeling are one. If this is art, then it is an ancillary art, and ancillary art is the only art I know. When I contemplate Nature, the works of man — even the greatest of them — appear to me small both in conception and achievement.

If there were a Creator Him would I passionately adore; but just as the empty firmament extends illimitably beyond the clouds and colours of our earthly sky, so over and above even the purest hopes and longings of man's heart there spreads the calm of truth. My face I turn upwards, and whether the sky be light or dark, the rays of truth strike down; out of that emptiness there comes no voice, no breath — no, but into that emptiness I enter and with it I become reconciled.



Looking back over my talks with Smith, I now see that we have been divided on two important questions neither of which we have ever clearly formulated. The first is this: What is it that constitutes religious experience as distinct from aesthetic experience? And secondly: Is it possible and desirable to make aesthetic experience fill the place of the other?

This morning I placed these questions before Smith, and invited him to express himself. He did not do so with any great willingness, but eventually I gathered that by religious experience he would designate all those conditions in which a man enjoys a sense of interior illumination, of direct awareness of the Numinous, or of communion with the Divine. These states of consciousness, he went on to say, are without value to anyone but the subject himself, because they offer no content the truth or error of which can be tested. The religious or mystic bias, is on the whole unsocial, tending to separate a man from his fellows, yet it prompts him to set himself up as their teacher. The religious-minded have always been impelled to lay down the law in matters of belief and conduct. The artistic faculty, on the other hand, conduces to no such didacticism, since artistic creations provide a common ground for estimating the value of an aesthetic experience. Consequently there is, he says, a brotherhood in art, a communion of one man with another on the aesthetic plane. The Beautiful places itself beside the Good and the True as an ideal that men can pursue in common, under a common discipline, and to their common advantage.

It was not, however, his contention that religious experience was of an altogether different kind from aesthetic: no, there was evidence that the first transformed itself into the second with the social and cultural advance of the community. The best measure of the civilization of any society was the value which it set upon Art. He begged me to remember that Reason, which was the guiding light of civilization, had always been on easier terms with art than with religion — and this for various reasons, the most obvious being that art did not attempt to legislate outside its own province.

As I considered these words of Smith's it became clear to me that it was through art that he had received his most valued experiences,

nor was it less clear that his religious sense was very inadequately developed. Further, I realized that my position in discussing these matters with him was complicated by my being a Buddhist, for Buddhism is not a religion in the sense usually attached to that word by Europeans. This I explained to Smith, adding that although I did not believe in God, I was more in sympathy with those who did than with him. Belief in God was indicative of an attitude of mind which I could not but regard as more desirable than his. 'There is that,' I said, 'which is more important than civilization; and just as the individual cannot live for himself, so cannot society live for itself, but must keep a self-transcendental ideal before it. Society is not worshipful, nor is humanity. Over and above the immanent there is the transcendent.'

'I see no reason why man should "worship" anything,' said Smith. 'So long as men aspire after goodness, truth and beauty, that is enough.'

I was silent for a few moments. How could I, without giving offence, explain to Smith that goodness, truth, and beauty, as he understood them, were far from being of the first importance? By goodness he meant virtuous behaviour; by truth he meant truth-telling and the pursuit of certain comparatively unimportant kinds of knowledge; and by beauty he meant the creation and appreciation of works of art. Smith is a Platonist, and Plato's influence in Europe has made itself felt in measure as the Christian has moved away from religion. It is not at Plato's but at Aristotle's feet that the Christian theologian sits; the disciple of Plato is the man of letters, the aesthete, the dilettante.

At last I said: 'It is through his moral, rational, and aesthetic intuitions that man apprehends certain goods; but the apprehension of the spiritual order of the universe is apprehended by the spiritual sense, and by that faculty alone.'

Smith fidgeted in his chair, and hesitated, then finally took the bull by the horns. 'You Indians make a great deal of the distinction between the "spiritual" life, which is a life focused upon the unseen, and our earthly life which you regard as doomed to be unsatisfactory. I cannot help feeling that this pessimistic attitude toward life on earth has sadly retarded your country's material and social development. India's spirituality has contributed little or nothing to the good of the world; and the veneration which Indians give to that spirituality in my opinion has been a mistake. What is the

spiritual order of the universe, unless it be an order exemplified in the better and happier living of the whole of mankind?"

'It should be thus exemplified,' was my answer, 'but it does not consist in that. What I am concerned to defend is not the Indian's way of life, but his conception of spirit and of the spiritual order of the universe.'

Smith looked down and away. 'The Indian's spirituality,' he muttered, 'often appears to me to be nothing more than a lack of common sense.'

'That lack,' I replied, laughing, 'is, alas, only too often allied to our spirituality. But let me point out that the same lack is evidenced, although in an opposite manner, in the European's concentration upon the mechanism of civilization, and his feverish activity which brings him no nearer to happiness. And just as you see common sense in only one of its aspects, so also you seem to us to have fallen into great confusion over the question what constitutes knowledge, and over the relative values of different kinds of knowledge. Knowledge at the lowest grade is merely a knowledge of nomenclature. For instance, the statement: Peking is in China, displays knowledge of that kind. Next comes particular information, such as is contained in the sentence: Agra has over a million inhabitants. After this we place general information such as that exemplified by the rules of arithmetic. Knowledge of this grade has great importance in its own sphere, which is the conceptual sphere; but, as it becomes more abstract, it also becomes less useful to the understanding. For this reason the Indian attaches less value to it than to knowledge that is part of the actual stuff of human experience. In popular parlance one says: "I now *know* what it is to be in love." To us this use of language is accepted as philosophically valid. Indeed, we consider that an implicit, if not explicit, refusal to recognize feelings and intuitions as constituting "knowledge" is the cause of an immense confusion in the philosophic thought of the West. The assumption that experience of this kind is of an inferior status leads to the further disastrous assumption that it must not be taken into account in seeking an understanding of the universe. But is a man really nearer to the heart of things when working out a problem in algebra than when reading the Sacred Books or listening to a great tragic play? To us it is evident that just as a knowledge, but not an understanding, of polo is to be obtained by studying handbooks on the game, so only a knowledge, not an understanding, of the universe

is to be obtained in conceptual or abstract terms. The approach to an understanding can only be made by the gradual apprehension of ultimate verities through the exercise of the spiritual sense'

'I have no knowledge,' replied Smith stubbornly, 'of a spiritual sense, nor of a special class of verities which it is its function to discover. You were speaking just now of tragedy. In tragedy the universe is interpreted to us by art; we need have no recourse to anything beyond art.'

'Tell me this,' I replied, 'if the spiritual sense were indeed identical with the aesthetic, how would it be possible to judge between great art and art that is perfect in a lesser kind? Yet that distinction is admitted. Some of us consciously -- others, like you, unconsciously -- recognize that art becomes great in the measure that it makes itself the vehicle of spiritual truth. Great literature, great music, great pictures, expand the consciousness with a breath that is not the aesthetic afflatus, and still less related to morality or rationality; but is essentially of its own kind -- spiritual. Great tragedy is pre-eminent in this power precisely because in tragedy -- more directly than in any other form of art -- the spiritual sense takes control and puts the aesthetic faculty to its own service. In tragedy we feel ourselves to be reached by the voice of wisdom; and what is wisdom, if it be not an apprehension of ultimate verities?'

'I do not yet see that you have established the existence of a spiritual sense. It is the harmonious interaction of aesthetic, rational, and ethical intuitions that produce wisdom'

'In our psychology,' I replied, 'we do not allow to those intuitions any such pre-eminence as you accord them. We include them in the general category of the *rashas*, along with the sense of the comic, the sublime, the petty, the incongruous, the tragic, the indecent, the pathetic, and so on. It is one of the functions of the spiritual sense to co-ordinate these other senses so that to the persons, circumstances, and events, presented to him in his life-experience the truly wise man may respond with perfect taste -- which is also perfect wisdom. The spiritual sense, the faculty of spiritual discrimination, must function on a plane superior to that of the other senses or intuitions because it is the valuator of those other modes of valuing. It is the co-ordinator of judgments by standards that otherwise have nothing in common. It is the judge between the pronouncements of any two, or more, modes of sensibility, when they appear to be out of harmony. On any particular occasion it

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decides what elements, if any, of beauty, ludicrousness, pettiness, pathos and so forth enter, and in what degree each enters. In this aspect it is more ordinarily recognized as Taste. But in making these judgments it may also be seen to be Wisdom, for no particular occasion can be judged without reference to the universe as a whole. It is thus that the wise man reveals himself as possessing a more intimate understanding of the universe than other men.'

It was foolish of me to go on at this length, for I had already become aware that my task was as hopeless as that of describing colour to a man who has been born blind. Moreover, Smith does not realize that his lack of a spiritual sense disqualifies him from arriving at a good or true philosophy of life. As for me, I do realize that my aesthetic sense is extremely limited, and that I must make allowances for this; but I cannot believe that my inability to take much interest in works of art *as such* is as dwarfing as Smith's disability.

EARLY next morning, as I was starting on my customary stroll, I came upon Smith, who was setting out in like fashion, so that it was inevitable that we should go together. By common consent we avoided controversial topics, and our walk would have passed off quite agreeably, but for an unfortunate incident which occurred just before we got back. Smith's attention was attracted by some blossoms on a creeper a little way off the path, and, being something of a botanist, he plunged into the brushwood in order to examine them. He had not taken many steps, however, before he stopped and stood still. He stood motionless for long enough to make me see that something was the matter, and when at last he tramped heavily back to me, I was struck by the strangeness of his expression. His face was pale, hard, and unfriendly. For a moment he looked me straight in the eyes, then — 'Another murder!' he said.

I was certainly startled; what I answered I cannot remember, but an unpleasant silence ensued, during which I became increasingly aware of the change in his attitude towards me. Then, recalling his conversation with Mobarek about the other murder, I saw what was the matter. He was associating me with Mobarek, and had already made up his mind that neither of us were people who could be trusted to deal with this misdeed in the right spirit.

After a minute we made a move towards the place where the corpse lay. The face of *this* victim had suffered no disfigurement, and I fancied that the features were not unfamiliar to me, although whether the man was a carrier of mine, of Smith's, or of Mobarek's, I could not say. He had been killed cleanly with a sword-thrust through the breast, and his clothes were intact.

As we were standing there we heard voices, and a moment later four men appeared from the direction of our encampment. They were carrying implements which showed that they were intending to give the body some kind of burial; but when they saw us, they looked embarrassed and withdrew. Smith gave me another look, which was even more significant than the first, and, as we were going back to our path, I said briefly: 'You may rest assured that I shall inquire into this.'

He cleared his throat. 'Those four who appeared just now — they are Mobarek's men.'

I could not deny it. Moreover they were known by Smith to be Moslems; and they had been chattering and laughing together, as if the burying of a murdered man was one of their everyday tasks.

We continued on our way, Smith walking behind me along the narrow path, when, on turning a corner, I caught sight of Mahomed Fazul, the captain of Mobarek's body-guard, no great distance ahead. The path in front of me forked, and I obeyed a sudden impulse to avoid meeting Fazul. Instead of coming after me, however, Smith paused, peered with his near-sighted eyes in the direction of Fazul, and then deliberately went by the other way. With a sharp movement of annoyance and foreboding I turned and followed him. The next moment we had reached Fazul. He was kneeling by a little stream, washing a blood-stained garment, while his unsheathed sword was lying on the bank by his side.

As we came up, he rose and with perfect composure made his usual salaam. Smith did not acknowledge it; grimly he walked straight on. As for me, I said: 'Mahomed Fazul, I shall wish to see you presently.' And again Fazul saluted with an unmoved face.

During the brief remainder of our way home no word was spoken. I was too much annoyed both with myself and with Smith to be the first to break the silence; as for him, keeping his eyes fixed upon the ground, he marched grimly along at my side, and, on reaching his tent, dived straight into it without giving me so much as a nod.

Considerably put out, I sat down in my own tent and considered the situation. I saw it as inevitable that Smith should now become fixed in his worst opinion of Mobarek and me; and this filled me with a sense of frustration and failure, it seemed a poor conclusion to our companionship.

Yes, looking at the matter through Smith's eyes, this is what I saw: Mobarek kept in his employ a savage and fanatical Arab, who had recently committed a murder, possibly two, almost under the eyes of his master; and the murderer had just exhibited a cynical coolness, which was no doubt largely explained by the fact that Mobarek not only derided religious toleration but vaunted himself on being a bloody-minded old bigot. As for me, for some time past my intellectual and moral integrity had been appearing more and more suspect, and my recent action in trying to screen Fazul had shown me up in my true colours at last. I fancy my position appeared to

Smith a particularly contemptible one. For, although a civilized human being (which Mobarek was decidedly not), I found specious reasons for rejecting the civilized view of life. So Smith was waiting to see what course events would take — waiting in grim expectation of seeing both Mobarek and me exhibit ourselves at our worst.

Such was my reading of Smith's mind; and now I will show the other side of the picture. The case for Mahomed Fazul rests almost wholly upon the character of the man himself. He belongs to one of those tribes of desert Arabs who spend their time in wandering over the harshest regions of the Arabian peninsula. Fifteen years ago Mobarek, returning from a visit to Persia, brought this man with him. For some years he served in the Imperial army, then was transferred to Mobarek's bodyguard of which he is now the Captain. During the whole of our present journey, I had been greatly impressed by Fazul's appearance and bearing, and by the respect in which his men held him. In Fazul I recognized a product of the desert — that place where only brave men can live, and they only by matching its austerity with the austerity of their lives. I know enough of the desert to realize what the first twenty-five years of Fazul's life must have been like. I know those wastes of harsh sand, rough gravel, and sharp stones, scorched and bleached by day, swept by chilling winds at night. It is out of this desolation, out of this poverty-stricken and yet splendid aridity, that there springs, like the frankincense tree, an unequalled faith in God. From nowhere else upon the earth does a fragrance of such sweetness and purity arise. How can one describe a passion that is as taintless as that air, steely in strength, and incandescent like the desert sun? When I look into Fazul's face I see a patch of desert ground, a surface hardened by endurance, trodden by every hardship. A gracious thing it is not; nor is the level look of those eyes other than repellent. That face is an iron door behind which the worship of Allah flames.

When, after much thought, I sent for Fazul, it was merely to tell him that I had seen the corpse in the wood and felt obliged to report the matter to his master. Next I questioned my own servants, and learned that the dead man had mocked Fazul at his prayers.

Before going to Mobarek, I sought out Smith and did my best to present Fazul's character to him in a favourable light. I pointed out that Mobarek would consider that the killing had been done under unendurable provocation. Indeed, could one, I asked,



expect Mobarek not to take the view that the dead man's behaviour had been practically equivalent to suicide?

We were sitting outside Smith's tent, and the bright morning sun revealed every shade of expression that passed over his face. Without a doubt he regarded my pleading as very specious, and disapproved of the attitude of mind underlying it. Censure was legible in every line of his countenance, and the stony silence in which he listened to me was very disheartening. I persisted, however, until suddenly he could contain himself no longer. A hot light came into his eyes, his hands began to grip one another, and he inquired curtly who was going to judge in the case. My words, he said, seemed to suggest that Mobarek was likely to take that office upon himself. But by what right? Let Mobarek appear as counsel for the defence by all means, but judge he should not, and could not, be.

I remained silent, overcome by discouragement. Whereupon, in a still more challenging tone, Smith went on: 'As it happens, in one of my last audiences with the Emperor I discussed this very question — I mean the dispensing of justice — and I found that his views were exactly similar to mine. He told me he was resolved that there should be a standardized procedure, and that neither race, nor caste, nor religion should be allowed to interfere with the impartial administration of the law.'

The note of triumphant satisfaction in Smith's voice was so ridiculous in its naivety that I really did not know how to reply. What was the use of trying to explain that it was absurd to pay any attention whatever to the Emperor's public pronouncements — certainly not to generalities such as these — and uttered for the benefit of a foreigner! Hastily I tried to get off the subject, but Smith would not have it; and I saw that I must give him a warning. If he was thinking of bringing the matter up to the Emperor in his next audience, let him, I said, consider the question again; moreover, it would be unwise — very unwise — to mention Akbar when discussing the affair with Mobarek.

After making every allowance for his principles, I am convinced that Smith is prejudiced by a strong personal dislike of Mobarek and an instinctive antipathy for Mahomed Fazul. I think that what I told him about Fazul probably did more harm than good. People like Fazul, by the mere fact of their existence, give Smith evidence of the inadequacy of his conception of human nature, and arouse in him an unacknowledged hostility. Smith's intolerance of intoler-

ance is nothing short of fanatical. He does not like to be disturbed in his comfortable belief that the whole human race, if it only knew its own mind a little better, would realize that it wants just what he wants and dislikes just what he dislikes. We are all of us apt to explain away other people's differences of taste as misconceptions on their part.

Now Fazul is typically representative of a race to whom civilization does not appeal in *any* of its actual manifestations. The Arab is found in two contrasting types; he is either splendid or squalid; but in neither case does he illustrate human nature as Smith likes to imagine it. As a chieftain going forth to war from the barbaric splendour of a Moorish palace, or as a sneak-thief in a slum, he is unmoved by either rational altruism or rational self-interest. The springs of his being are not those upon which civilization counts. He has no inclination to make himself comfortable in the world; what he prizes and lives by is just that which the apostles of humanism are obliged to ignore or deny.

Having come to the end of my profitless talk with Smith, I went to Mobarek, whom I found alone in his tent, writing a dispatch with his own hand. His keen, little eyes fastened upon me shrewdly; I think he noticed that I was troubled. In my brief statement of the facts I hardly mentioned Smith, but, when I had done, he said with a smile: 'I am sure this must have been very shocking to our excellent friend. But no doubt you were able to soothe him.'

'Not completely. But I have pointed out that the affair is not his business.'

Mobarek looked amused. 'Rajah! how could you say that to a lover of justice, to the friend of all humanity!'

I laughed, but on Smith's account I was uneasy. 'Why not suggest to the Emperor that Smith would do well to leave India?'

This was perhaps a tactless thing to say, for Mobarek frowned. 'It is not as simple as that. The Emperor takes an interest in foreigners, and he has not yet discovered the ineptitude of Smith. Daniyal, too, has taken Smith under his protection.'

After a pause he went on: 'Little does Smith realize that for Daniyal he has only the interest of a novelty. A few months ago the Prince was busy learning magic from the witch doctors of West Africa; before that he was being indoctrinated with the lore of Ancient Egypt. In a few weeks, when the Prince is tired of him, Smith will be thrust into the background to take his place among

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the freaks with which the Camp is swarming — a place somewhere between the hairless cat from Kamtchatka and the troupe of little golden-skinned eunuchs that has just arrived from Cebu.'

With these words his manner suddenly changed, he summoned a servant and sent for Mahomed Fazul, asking me to remain present while he questioned him. Fazul stepped into the tent with an air of perfect tranquillity, and, when questioned, gravely confessed to the deed.

'Why did you kill this man?' asked Mobarek. 'Had he attacked you?'

'No.'

'Had he insulted you?'

'Yes, but that was not why I killed him.'

'Then why?'

'He mocked the worship of Allah.'

Mobarek was silent, looking down at the table. When he raised his head his eyes were closed and his lips slightly pursed. Lying back in his chair he gave a short sigh. 'Very well,' he brought out at last. 'It was fated. Go in peace.'

A silence fell between us, which Mobarek was the first to break. He gave me a look, still satirical but friendly, and began to talk of other things. In a little while I got up and left him.

WE reached Kathiapur at sunset on the same day, and parted with one another on the outskirts of the town. Mobarek was met by the Governor; Smith by some friends of Daniyal's whose guest he was to be; and as for me, refusing an invitation from the Governor on the plea that Srilata had already made ready for my arrival, I wandered off by myself.

It was an evening of golden sunlight, the sky being very clear in the west, but dappled with pink clouds overhead. During the day we had travelled down through a country of old, gnarled trees and broken rocks, where the wild meadows were bordered with red and yellow azaleas and cut up by rushing brooks of ice-cold water. But with every step it had grown warmer, and gradually the brooks had turned into streams which were spanned by high-backed bridges and bordered by almond trees and banks of Persian lilac. The larger houses that we passed had deep overhanging eaves of carved cedar with projecting oriels and windows filled with pinjra work in arabesque designs. It was a prosperous valley, filled with the sound of bells from grazing flocks, a part of the world where a serene and silken life was flowing on. At last the silvered roofs of temples appeared among the leafage, and Kathiapur lay before us, a little town of many gardens, where each man had his own tree for shade.

For a while, I sat beside a well, looking up into the sky, and my thoughts turned to Sita. In my constant awareness of the evanescence of earthly things there is a calm neither glad nor sorrowful, but sometimes strangely poignant. At such times I share the longing of those lesser poets whose hearts are bent on capturing in words a fragrance that otherwise blows away. Surveying the scene as one who formed no part of it, the thought of Sita, whose spirit is not called upon to renounce earthly joys, hauntingly recurred to me. Sinlessly she belongs to this earth, this earth enrichingly to her; there is a great-heartedness in her acceptance of my different predestination, and I felt grateful to her for it.

I cannot hope to find in either Srilata or Ambissa a like understanding. Each will have her reasons for disapproval, and although

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Ambissa's remonstrances will be the more vehement, it is not hers that I shall find the hardest to ignore.

By the time I had roused myself from these thoughts dusk had fallen, and I had some difficulty in finding the house that Srilata is occupying. It is a pretty little dwelling that stands in the middle of its own garden in a retired quarter. Thanks to her, I myself am now established in a house of the same pattern not more than a hundred yards away.

After dining together, we went out into her garden and there settled down to a leisurely talk. It is not many months since I last saw her, and yet my attention was caught at once by her small foibles, just as though they were not well-known to me, or as if she could reasonably be expected to have cast them off. However, I am paying her a compliment when I say that it is her lapses in intelligence that I always notice with the most surprise. To begin with, I found that she had accepted, apparently without question, the prevailing belief that at Ravi my acquaintance with Daniyal had ripened into friendship. 'Do tell me something more about your life up there,' she said. 'It must have been most amusing to have the Pleasance of the Arts — such a charming name, by the way, isn't it? — quite close at hand. At Agra you gave me the impression that you had taken a prejudice against Daniyal. You seemed even to disapprove of *my* being a friend of his. Perhaps you weren't giving me the credit of being alive to his faults. But of course I have always realized that at times he is very silly, and that perhaps there is even a streak in his character that one can't altogether like. However, I do think he has a genuine love of beauty — and then, of course, he is so witty, such good company. I am sure you agree about that.'

These words positively took my breath away. Then I realized that it was out of kindness of heart that Srilata was imagining this change in me. She has always lamented what she considers my eccentricity, my inability to accept current valuations. Whenever I differ from the world, she feels sorry; for she cannot conceive that anyone sufficiently wideawake to catch the latest taste might possibly still prefer his own.

I made haste to explain that my life at Ravi had not been at all what she imagined; and that I had seen practically nothing of the Prince. 'I am afraid,' I said, 'that you are going to find me without news of any kind. On the other hand, I am expecting all manner of interesting news from you. To-morrow, as you know, I shall be

seeing Ambissa; and I should like to appear as little behind the times as I can; so please do your best to bring me up to date.'

With her never-failing amiability, Srilata made haste to comply, but, alas! in a very short time, I was reminded that people who live in society form a habit of fastening only upon the odds and ends of things that possess conversational value. Talk consists in the passing round of little bright coins, the worth of which is unimportant, provided that they come straight from the mint.

Srilata's political information was of no use to me, except as showing that everyone in her set assumed that Salim was no longer a person to be reckoned with. When I pointed out to her that Salim had, after all, a large army at his back and commanded the sympathy of the whole Mahommedan world, my words passed over her without producing the smallest effect. The possibility of an arbitrament by arms clearly did not come within the scope of her imagination. All she replied was: 'Well, my dear, from what I hear Salim has hardly a friend left in Court, and as for the Emperor, he leaves everything to Mobarek nowadays. Everyone says that he has been falling to pieces very rapidly in these last months. I don't think it will be long before he hands the Throne over to Daniyal.'

'These rumours about the Emperor's physical and mental condition are nothing new,' I replied. 'I rather wonder at your paying any attention to them.'

'Well, I am only telling you what people say. For instance, Babilo Tud was having luncheon with me here a few days ago, and he assured me that when he met Mabun Das coming away from his last audience with the Emperor, Mabun was positively dismayed. Akbar, Mabun said, had been drinking his usual mixture of wine and opium all the afternoon, and seemed unable or unwilling to discuss anything except the suppression of the Secret Sects. I am afraid that he has become quite unbalanced on that subject. Have you heard that *another* three or four hundred people were executed only the other day? And Mabun Das, who is obliged to do the rounding up of these poor wretches, was in despair about it. He said that what with wine, and opium, and religion, the Emperor was becoming quite incapable.'

I shrugged. I was thinking how curiously shrewdness and stupidity were mixed up in the world's current gossip. Moreover, this was all at second-hand. But Srilata might quote Mabun Das, Man Singh, Abul-Fazul, or anyone else she pleased, even at first-hand,

and yet I should remain entirely unimpressed. If important statesmen were to say what they really think at fashionable luncheon parties, either the statesmen would soon cease to be important or the luncheon parties to be fashionable. Shallowness is an indispensable requisite in polite conversation. Srilata knows as well as I do that it has long been the fashion in certain sets either to make fun of the Emperor or to shake one's head compassionately over his supposed decline.

To change the topic I asked her to tell me something about the people I was going to come across at Kathiapur, and she complied with polite animation. The interest she takes in scandal and intrigue is unflagging, but it is also light and detached. That she was in the thick of the social life at Kathiapur was evidenced by the number of notes that came in to her during the course of the evening. It was really very good of her, I reflected, to have reserved all these hours for me.

'The Khan arrived a few days ago,' she was presently saying; 'but Mobarek need not worry; the old gentleman has been quite happy here; everyone in the place has been at his feet from the moment he came; Mobarek in fact will find him in a particularly genial frame of mind.'

'And what of Lalita?' I inquired.

'She and her sisters are here too. They are living under Ambissa's wing; and she, as you know, is a guest of the Governor's. The Governor lives in a sort of park in which there are several guest-houses. Ambissa with the three girls occupies one of them. The girls, I am afraid, have all been running rather wild since their mother's death; and Ambissa's responsibilities as *duenna* here in Kathiapur are particularly heavy. However...' and Srilata broke off.

'Tell me something about the Khan's daughters,' I said. 'The only one I know is Lalita.'

'Oh, so you *have* met her?' said Srilata quickly. 'When was that?'

I had a moment's hesitation — caused by my memory of the snatched embrace that I had chanced to witness. 'I met her,' I said, 'on my journey from Khanjo to Ravi. She was travelling down from the Camp with Mobarek.'

Srilata looked interested. 'Was Hari with you then?'

'Yes.'

There was a pause, in which we both wondered how much the

other knew. Then Srilata went on: 'Well, as you have seen for yourself, Lalita is very pretty, and in my opinion, the others are prettier still, for Lalita is a little too big for my taste. I know that a good many people — mostly men, I think — admire these large-boned Hill women; personally I prefer a more finely-made type. Mahil and Parmi are smaller than Lalita, but all three have the same lovely colouring. Nothing is more attractive to my mind than that tawny effect which you get when the hair is a shade lighter than the skin — especially when the eyes are blue. Some people don't care about a parti-coloured head of hair, but I find those tresses in various hues of gold quite enchanting. Mahil, the eldest, is twenty-two, and married; but her husband, who is a soldier, is away on the Northern Frontier keeping his eye on Mahommed Ali. I think she is the least reckless of the three. Parmi, the youngest, is only sixteen, and, although she is much less mature than our girls are at that age, she already behaves badly enough. It is a thousand pities there is no one in the family to keep a firm hand on her. The one I am most concerned about, however, is Lalita — on account of her special position.'

'But, gracious heavens!' I exclaimed, 'do you really mean to tell me that Lalita would be such a fool as to compromise herself now?'

Srilata laughed, and said nothing.

Presently, as it was getting late, I made as though to go, but Srilata, accustomed to staying up all night, would not hear of my leaving her yet. 'Surely,' she said, 'you ought to make some return for all my indiscretions?' And with that she began questioning me about Daniyal and Lalita. What was the general feeling among Daniyal's friends about this match? What did Mobarek think about it? Had I ever heard Daniyal refer to it, and if so, in what sort of tone?

My answers, I have no doubt, were disappointing, and I am afraid that she thought I might have been more interesting had I wished. But she is never insistent, and presently she led the conversation on to Hari, asking what had prompted him to return to Ravi, and why, on his way from Agra, he had made a detour to avoid Kathiapur.

'He came back to Ravi,' I said, 'because Gokal had taken a turn for the worse and was particularly anxious to see him. You know what devoted friends they are. As for his avoiding Kathiapur, I



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didn't know that he had. Hari is an unaccountable creature, as we all know.'

Srilata looked at me pensively.

'The thought that Hari is at Ravi now is a great comfort to me,' I went on. 'I should hardly have cared to leave the place without some person in charge. The Camp has attracted all sorts of strange characters into the neighbourhood, and the presence of someone like Hari is almost a necessity. 'Servants, however trustworthy, never know how to act in an emergency.'

A little later, feeling thoroughly tired, I got up and took myself off to bed.

My hours of sleep were brief, and I awoke with a sharp distaste for the business that lay before me. Memories of long unsatisfactory discussions with Ambissa rose into my mind, and I resolved to guard against falling into my habitual mistakes. But immediately afterwards I remembered how often in the past I had armed myself with similar resolutions, and all to no purpose; for it seemed to make very little difference what plan of action I adopted, or how strong-mindedly I adhered to it. Ambissa always has some scheme in her head to which she wants me to be accessory, and there is something about even her most innocent schemes that I always greatly dislike.

In striking contrast to Srilata, who has a light hand, Ambissa persists; she never absolves one from the necessity of explaining oneself; this involves explaining her to herself; a thing which it is impossible to do agreeably.

The fact that Ambissa is not a bad woman, only makes the position more difficult. Although her aims are invariably worldly, her strategy unscrupulous, and her tactics wanting in finesse, her motives are rarely, if ever, reprehensible. The advancement of herself and her family is what she has in view; and social ambitions — especially those on behalf of others — can hardly be called wicked; so that I can easily be made to look over-particular for refusing to help her, a person more regardful of his own fastidiousness than of the welfare of his kith and kin.

There is no denying that Ambissa has had a successful social career. Her position at Court is impregnable, and she has prepared an excellent future for her sons. If Daniyal has been a thorn in her side, if he has amused himself by sticking darts into her, if he has ostentatiously refused to admit her into his inner circle, no one doubts that this is just fun and that at any moment he may swing round. Moreover, just as after a certain age old people begin to take a pride in the number of their years, so Ambissa has acquired a reputation which enables her to glory in the thickness of her skin. Thus, if I understand her relations with Daniyal aright, a kind of camaraderie, as between insulter and insulted, has grown up between them.

To do Ambissa justice, however, it is greatly to her credit that she

is able to think of Daniyal without hatred. Nay more, I think I can say of her that she is without malice, spite, or hatred in regard to anyone. Once, when I pointed this out to Sita, she replied that no man could serve two masters, still less three; and that Ambissa was so much taken up with the World that neither the Flesh nor the Devil stood any chance with her. But without question Sita is inclined to be hard on Ambissa who is possessed of many virtues. She is a devoted mother, and would have made a very good wife according to her lights, if Hari had ever given her an opportunity.

The sun was already hot when I strolled over to the Governor's Park. I passed through the gates without challenge, and moved towards some grey shingled roofs that rose against a background of tall trees. Dragon-flies were hanging over the lily-ponds that skirted the road, and fallow deer stared at me curiously from out of the shade. I came to a group of long, low houses, about one hundred yards apart; and still not a single human being did I see.

Mounting the steps to the first of these houses, I found myself face to face with a pretty girl who had appeared on the veranda. She took a good look at me before retreating through an open window into the room behind. I heard her announce my presence, upon which there was a considerable stir within, and a moment later Ambissa hurried out. She greeted me with a warmth which I felt to be genuine enough, although her expression of it was exceedingly mannered. This she cannot help; besides, she was smothering a momentary vexation. 'Did my servants send you here?' she said. 'Because they shouldn't have done that. No, no! this is not my house. Mine is the one over there. But never mind. — I do hope you haven't been kept waiting. We . . .' With a sudden frown she broke off, as, from somewhere behind her girls' voices rose in altercation. But only for a moment, the high notes died down into muffled laughter.

'Come over to my house,' Ambissa went on, and somewhat precipitately she led the way. 'Dear Amar, how glad I am to see you! I was quite afraid you might not come after all, and I have so much to say. Besides, I want you to tell me all about yourself. How did you leave the dear Prince? I hear he has gone up into the mountains for a complete rest. I am sure he needs it. The journey down here would have been very tiring. Lalita has had such charming letters from him. — Yes, here we are; and now I am going to take you to my private room where we shan't be disturbed.'

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She produced a key from somewhere, unlocked a door, and we went in. A large desk littered with her correspondence reminded me once more that her life is a very busy one.

'Now we can have a long, leisurely talk,' she went on; 'and how delightful to think that we have several days before us. You will stay here for a week at least, won't you? In Agra one never has a moment to oneself, but here . . .' While she was speaking her eyes wandered restlessly, and one could not fail to notice her intense inward preoccupation. This symptom distressed me, for it was something new. Up to now it has been one of her triumphs that she has managed, even when driving herself most hard, to present an appearance of repose.

All at once, in the middle of a sentence, she got up, opened the door, and looked out into the passage. 'Oh, darling!' she cried. 'There you are! Yes, Amar is with me. Yes, isn't it delightful! And so you are going back now? Well, tell the Khan I shall be coming this afternoon. Good-bye, darling, good-bye.'

Closing the door again swiftly and firmly, she waited for a moment, then came back, once more rearranging her expression. The smile she had put on for the lady outside was evidently not quite the same as the one she keeps for me. With me she feels that the serious side of her character must be in evidence, — quite a mistaken idea, for I don't need to be persuaded that she takes life seriously. No, no, the difference between us lies merely in our choice of what things to take seriously.

It was natural that she should begin talking about our mother's death; she lamented that she had been unable to be with us at that time; and again, although her words were conventional, I felt that they were not insincere. Had she allowed herself any leisure for grief, she would most certainly have grieved; but in her life grief is a self-indulgence for which she has no time. Few people, I fancy, are capable of such a stern subordination of the natural instincts as she; and, if she shed a few tears now, those tears were not a sign of grief actually felt, they were rather a tribute to the grief she has been obliged to forego.

Her next subject was Ali. She was anxious about the boy, for he certainly should have reached Kathiapur before now. But here she contented herself with a few brief questions, and, as soon as she saw I had nothing to tell her, she passed on. Very painstakingly she set about justifying herself in having sent him up to the Camp; and, as

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I listened, I felt that at last we were getting down to business. I knew that she wanted me to repeat these excuses to Hari on my return to Ravi. When at length she did pronounce Hari's name, something in her manner put me on the alert. Hitherto she has always talked of him in the tone of the aggrieved, but still forgiving, wife. Her accent to-day sounded harder — not exactly harsh, but firm with the firmness of one upon whom a stern decision has at last been forced. Now and then she would pause, waiting, I think, to see what my response would be.

'Amar,' she said, after a longer pause than usual, 'did you have any talk with Hari before coming here?'

'You mean, I suppose, any private talk? — No. He arrived in the evening. The next morning early I went over to the Camp.'

She looked at me hard as if she were trying to read my thoughts. 'He had been away for some days, hadn't he?'

I felt vaguely surprised at her knowing what Hari's movements had been; and now, having had time to think the matter over, I feel still more surprised; to-morrow, perhaps, I shall ask her to explain. The answer, I made, was that Hari's return was fortunate, for I could hardly have undertaken this journey had there been no one to look after my household while I was away.

'You left them all by themselves — without Hari or anyone — at Khanjo,' Ambissa observed; and for the next few minutes we talked about Sita, Ambissa evidently wishing to show friendliness in her regard. Then again her tone changed, and I felt we were getting back to business.

'I wonder if you realize how unfortunate this quarrel between Hari and Daniyal has been? It makes everything particularly difficult just now. In fact I am afraid it has been nothing short of disastrous.'

'Oh come!' I answered. 'I am sure you are exaggerating. The Prince talked to me about Hari only the other day, and as far as I can judge he isn't harbouring any resentment at all.'

These words should have been pleasant to hear, but a shade of annoyance appeared on Ambissa's face. 'My dear Amar, I doubt very much whether the Prince would allow you to see what he was feeling. But I am not thinking about that so much as about Hari's attitude towards him.'

I remained silent, and she continued to look at me impatiently. 'I want you to consider very carefully the position in which Hari

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has placed himself. You don't realize, perhaps, how tense the political situation now is, and besides you probably look upon Hari as an irresponsible character, who has neglected his affairs for so long that no one now pays any attention to him. I assure you that is quite a mistake. People don't dismiss Hari as easily and good-naturedly as you do. For one thing they remember — which you do not — that Hari is a Border chieftain. That in itself is enough to make people keep a watchful eye on him.'

Again she paused.

'You are leading up to something,' I said. 'What is it?'

'I am certainly leading up to something,' Ambissa answered slowly. 'I wonder if you know that for some time past Hari has been intriguing very dangerously?'

'Intriguing?' As I stared at her I wondered whether she had heard something about Hari's flirtation with Lalita.

'It seems that Hari has been intriguing with Mahommed Ali.' Ambissa spoke with great gravity. 'And not only with Mahommed Ali, but also, more recently, with Prince Salim direct.'

If I was taken back, I was also incredulous. 'I wonder who told you that?' was my reply.

Ambissa leant forward, very much in earnest. 'You want to know who told me? — Well, it was the Emperor himself!'

'Oh!' The tone of my voice was an admission that she had made her effect. I remember staring at her in a vain effort to decipher her peculiarly unrevealing expression. Was her news as grave as she wanted me to think it? I began asking questions; I pressed her closely; and, alas, couldn't escape the conclusion that Hari was in very serious trouble.

When Ambissa saw that she had made her point, she nerved herself to utter the words that were to be her climax. With a firm face she came out with the announcement that she had divorced Hari!

It was some moments before I was able to grasp exactly what she meant. Only a few months ago, when Hari had been full of empty threats about divorcing her, she had shown great distress and a quite unreasonable alarm. Now I had to get it into my head that *she* had divorced *him*. And then, how had she managed it? The Emperor is making divorce very difficult, and for a wife to divorce her husband is practically unprecedented. I had every excuse for amazement. But there was no getting over the accomplished fact. The Emperor

had apparently regarded Hari's treasonable activities as sufficient grounds for divorce.

At last I understood — and only too clearly — why Ambissa had been so anxious to see me. I was to go back to Ravi and inform Hari, first about Ali's attendance upon Daniyal in the Camp, and secondly about the divorce. Nor was this the worst, because it presently came out that the Emperor was about to order him to retire for an unspecified period to his estates in Sind; a place where he would be well out of the way. He was to be forbidden on pain of death to return to his Border principality, which was to be put under 'the temporary administration' of the Khan. Ambissa counted on me to convey this news to Hari in such a manner as to make him see the wisdom of submitting without any useless fuss.

By this time I had lost the desire to argue or even to comment. My eyes remained fixed upon Ambissa in a gloomy stare; and I am bound to say that she returned my stare with unwinking firmness. Truly, she is a remarkable woman. Her eyes, her whole expression, the straight line of her back, all informed me that she was well prepared for everything I had to say. I accordingly reserved myself for another talk later on. I merely pointed out that, Hari being the man he is, there would very likely be murder.

Ambissa never blenched. She raised her eyebrows a little, sighed a little, and looked a little pained. Vaguely and reasonably she talked about retribution, and the wisdom of bowing before the inevitable. Nevertheless, it made her very sad, she said, that things had come to such a pass; she had spent sleepless nights. But all that was over; and now there was nothing to be done but to resign oneself.

I got up to go. Our talk had lasted nearly three hours.

'When will you come again?' she asked quickly, and began turning over the leaves of her engagement book. 'It would be so nice if you would look in this evening. I have a little party, and I want you to make friends with these three girls of the Khan's. Such dears, all of them.'

I replied that I could not promise to come. It was not unlikely that I should spend my evening with Srilata.

She gave me a sharp look. 'Srilata knows all that I have been telling you, but — please remember this, Amar! — to the rest of the world my divorce is for the present a secret.'

I HAD intended as an act of courtesy to call on the Governor, but now I dismissed the idea. Leaving the house, I walked quickly away; but after a moment footsteps sounded on the road behind; it was the Governor who was hurrying after me.

'How are you, my dear Rajah?' he called out in a tone of excessive cordiality. 'I was sitting on the veranda with the young Princesses when I saw you pass. Do you mind if I accompany you as far as the gate?'

Feeling slightly guilty, I did my best not to fall behind my companion in amiability. Nevertheless my second view of this man confirmed me in the impression that there was something about him that I did not like. He is tall, well-built, and handsome — in a rather commonplace way; he has an air of geniality, he wears a smile that is frank and open; and yet he does not inspire confidence.

Falling into step beside me, he began chatting about this and that, but I felt sure he had something up his sleeve; and after a minute he said: 'I was hoping to catch you after your talk with Ambissa Begum, for that European traveller, Pundit Smith, has just been in to see me about the two murders that have taken place up the valley. Quite an agreeable fellow, Smith, — but, I am afraid, something of a busybody. He appears to be determined to bring the matter up before the Emperor in his next audience.'

These words made me feel sure that the Governor had already guessed pretty accurately on what terms Mobarek, Smith, and I stood to one another. I answered that I didn't suppose the Emperor would pay much attention to Smith.

'In ordinary circumstances,' he agreed, 'His Majesty certainly would not. But I am rather afraid he may take it into his head that the first murder was a sacrificial one, committed by the members of some secret sect. In that case there will be a great to-do. I wish we had some means of identifying the victim.' He gave me a meaning look as he said this, but its significance was lost on me, and he was obliged to add: 'I don't like to confess that Ali's disappearance is beginning to worry me considerably. Isn't he by way of having left the Camp two days before you did?'

'I believe so.'



'Well, have you any theory about his disappearance?'

'It seems to me to be not at all unlikely that he made a detour in order to get in a little shooting.'

'That is possible, I suppose.'

I halted. I looked into the Governor's face, and could no longer avoid the idea which he was insinuating into my mind.

'Are you suggesting,' I said, 'that the disfigured body I saw in the wood . . . ?'

His grave look was sufficient reply. When I next spoke it was to give voice to anxious, painful conjectures. The body, I said, seemed to me to have been that of a bigger boy than Ali; but boys of Ali's age change very quickly, and, alas, I couldn't on that score give myself the reassurance I craved. However, I went on, Ali certainly had attendants; and, if an attack had been made, some of his men would have assuredly escaped to bring in the news. Moreover, robbery apart, no motive for attacking the boy could be conceived, nor was it likely that robbers would have thought Ali worth attacking.

Whilst talking, we walked up and down in the burning sun, and physical discomfort was added to my mental distress. I cannot say I had ever had any peculiar affection for Ali, whom I hardly knew, but I was filled with pity for Ambissa.

'In my opinion,' I said, 'it is quite unnecessary to speak about these murders to the boy's mother as yet. After all, Ali may turn up here safe and sound at any moment.'

My companion gave a nod. 'I also hope,' he added, 'that this mystery will be solved before Akbar begins to interest himself in it — or in the other mysteries connected with the Camp. It would be a pity if Ali's name was to be coupled with that of the girl Gunevati.'

I looked up sharply. The mention of Gunevati took me entirely by surprise.

'Of all the secret sects Akbar naturally detests the Vamacharis the most,' he went on, 'and when it is reported to him that Gunevati is a member of that sect . . .'

'What . . . ?' I stopped short. 'Do you say that Gunevati is a Vamachari? What reason have you to think that?'

The Governor smiled. 'I know it.'

'How?'

'My dear Rajah, there is no shadow of doubt. I have seen the dossier on that girl. Mabun Das left it here for me to study. Let me tell you, Gunevati is not merely a member of the sect, she is one of

their Yoginis — if you know what I mean? She embodies the Goddess in their secret rites.' He paused; his face was superficially inexpressive, yet I received very strongly an impression of inward gloating.

For a couple of minutes we walked along in complete silence. I was thinking that in the light of this information Gokal's association with Gunevati, which had looked bad enough before, reached the uttermost limits of scandalousness. For how long, I wondered, had the wretched girl been occupying the attention of people in high places? It seemed to me ridiculous. A dossier, indeed! And I didn't at all like the idea that this dossier was in the hands of the Governor.

'Anyhow,' I said dryly, 'Ali has nothing to do with the Vama-charis, and nothing to do with Gunevati, and consequently . . .'

'Ali,' the Governor interjected sharply, 'was not — I mean — is not unacquainted with Gunevati.'

'They are both living in the Camp,' I returned with anger. 'More than that . . .'

'They have been seen in each other's company very frequently. And I suppose you know who it was that brought them together?'

'Who?'

'I am afraid that it was your son — Jali.'

'Jali — you say?'

'Yes.'

I mustered a smile, which, no doubt, looked sufficiently uncomfortable to give the Governor considerable satisfaction. 'Please explain.'

'Well, Gunevati, you must remember, was not a stranger to Jali, for he and she were close neighbours at Khanjo, and at the Camp that acquaintance was renewed. — But perhaps Jali's visits to the Camp were sometimes made without your knowledge?'

I tried to cover my inward disarray. 'Yes. But his cousin being at the Camp, it was not unnatural . . .'

'Exactly,' said the Governor, 'exactly! And I don't for a moment wish to suggest that Jali was doing anything wrong.' As he was speaking these last words, he turned to look behind him, and, following his example, I saw that Smith was hurrying along to overtake us. This, I decided, was the moment to bring our conversation to an end. Taking leave of the Governor with as much politeness as I had at my command, I left him to the company of Smith and walked rapidly away.

ON getting home I took some food and threw myself down on my divan. Dismissing the Governor from my mind, I turned my thoughts upon Hari in an endeavour to find a means of helping him. The blow that was about to fall was severe. Banishment to that property of his in Sind was virtually a sentence of imprisonment — and imprisonment under miserable conditions, for those lands bring in very little revenue. As for the revenue from his Border principalities, that would certainly flow into the coffers of the Emperor — after the Khan had deducted what he considered his due as administrator. Yes, I saw it clearly now; that administration was being handed over to the Khan as yet another bribe for his continued allegiance. The disaster that was overtaking Hari might, of course, be regarded as retributive justice; that was the way Ambissa looked at it; but personally I felt the punishment to be too severe. Then, too, there was something ugly in the part Ambissa was playing. I did not go so far as to suspect her of having helped to bring about Hari's downfall; but it did seem to me that she had been rather quick to snatch at this divorce.

In the midst of these reflections I fell asleep. No doubt the enervating air of this place accounts for it. When I awoke it was to see my servant standing by my side, and I saw from his apologetic face that it was he who had roused me. Srilata Begum, he said, begged that I would come to her house as soon as I conveniently could.

Not a little anxious I jumped up, and a few minutes later I was there. A confused clamour of female voices greeted my ears, and in the hall I was hustled by three overdressed women who were hurrying away. The next moment my eyes fell upon the figure of Ambissa, who lay stretched upon the floor in a little room just by the entrance. Lalita was fanning her, while Srilata and two girls, whom I took to be Mahil and Parmi, were hovering round with restoratives. I examined Ambissa, who was unconscious, but it was difficult to tell how ill she really was because of the paint on her face. On my appearance the noise had died down, and Srilata now explained that an hour ago Ambissa had been very much upset by news of some murders recently committed on the road down from the Camp. Thinking that the Governor was to be found here, and

wishing to question him, she had hurried over in the heat of the day but hardly had she crossed the threshold before faintness had overtaken her.

In the midst of Srilata's explanations a doctor arrived, and he very wisely insisted that Ambissa should be left in quiet; so we all trooped out into the big room that looks upon the garden, and there my attention was at once engaged by the Khan's three daughters. Lalita greeted me almost as an old friend; indeed I was a little taken aback by her manner which seemed to assume the existence of a kind of intimacy. Then Srilata presented Mahil, whose caressing eyes looked into mine as if she could see at once that we were companion spirits. Next came little Parmi, with cheeks flushed and eyes eager, as if from the pressure of exciting secrets. These young creatures spread about them an atmosphere tingling with animal vitality. The stream of life running through them was fresh and clear. Very different was their animation from that of the women in Daniyal's Camp.

Taken all three together, however, they were decidedly overpowering. They have a trick of all speaking at once and of shouldering each other away from whomsoever happens to be the object of their attention. For the moment that object was me; and I felt as might one who had just been thrust into the cage of three friendly but over-vivacious tiger-cubs. Tawny, I remember, was the word Srilata had used in describing them; and tawny I felt them to be in inward as well as in outward colouring. Their volubility was terrific; they poured forth talk about Smith, the Governor, and Ambissa. They were vexed with Smith, for it was he apparently who had spoken to Ambissa about the murders; they made fun of the Governor (at least Mahil and Lalita did); for Ambissa they expressed an appropriate sympathy. Whilst I was being thus assailed, Srilata stood by, looking resigned and helpless.

Presently the doctor came in and he was able to allay our anxieties. Ambissa's heart was perfectly sound; there was no cause for anxiety; but she was driving herself too hard, and ought by rights to take a complete rest for several weeks. The young tigresses, stirred into fresh excitement, seized upon the doctor for all the world as if he were a bit of raw meat; but after a while he took refuge behind Srilata, and very soon in her company made good his escape.

Left unprotected, I was wondering how I should fare, when, most unexpectedly, a pleasant hush descended. The tempest dropped to

a gentle breeze, and it was not long before I realized that the three sisters had many other moods besides the noisy one they had just been exhibiting. The next quarter of an hour passed quietly and agreeably enough. And it was profitable too, for I picked up a good many impressions that are likely to be valuable to me later.

Our talk was brought to an end by the sudden appearance of the Governor. I looked up to see him standing in the doorway with something like a smirk upon his face. Whilst his glances were travelling over my companions, I gave him another critical survey, and I must say I found him more unattractive than ever. In the presence of these young women his moustaches seemed to gain an extra curl, his complexion an extra glow, his fine shoulders an extra swing. Coming forward he embarked upon a gallant speech, but was unable to get very far with it. Behind him an enormous shape loomed up, a large, fat hand thrust him aside, and the Khan, bulky, red, and self-important, strode into the centre of the room.

'Greetings, Rajah, greetings!' he called out, glaring at me out of his prominent, blue eyes. 'Where's your sister, Rajah? What's this I hear about Ambissa, eh? What's all the to-do?'

Rising in unison, the three sisters flung themselves upon their father simultaneously, and he received three loud and voluble explanations all at once. Inevitably, before the pressure of such an advance, he yielded ground; he backed, and went on backing until presently the Governor and I found ourselves alone in the room.

But were we alone? A moment later I discovered that we were not. Standing in the door that gave upon the garden was Mabun Das. How he got there I do not know, but he now came forward with quiet self-assurance, greeted me cordially, and suggested that we should have a talk together under the mango tree at the end of Srilata's little lawn. I followed him out of doors with willingness; not only was I glad to escape further conversation with the Governor, but Mabun has always interested me. I recognize in him a man of strong character and outstanding ability; and perhaps, if I understood him better, I should like him more. I know him to live a life of tireless public service, to take pride in efficiency, and to be devoted to the Emperor. And yet he gives me the impression that he is without any interest in ultimate aims and ends; I suspect him to be at heart a cynic.

Out first subject — not an uncommon one in this country — was

the Emperor. The key, said Mabun, to the Emperor's character was his pride in the fact that the blood of both Jenghiz Khan and Tamerlane was flowing in his veins; and to this consciousness of pre-eminence by birth he added the consciousness of pre-eminence by achievement. Never had he met anyone who was his equal, nor could he in his innocence conceive that such a one might exist. His conscious mind was that of a very simple man. What was it but his simplicity — one might almost say his humility — that caused him to identify his greatness with God's? One had to remember that in him the reasoning or rationalizing self was not highly developed; he was not of the sort who ignore in themselves everything that does not lie open to their examination or under their conscious direction. No, Akbar went to the other extreme; he identified himself with the whole mass of those unknown forces from which he derived his individual inspiration and potency. Thus it was that, rejoicing blindly in the streams of energy that rushed up into his being from the primordial fountains of life, he was gradually losing the power to distinguish between himself and God. In his earlier days military campaigns had absorbed his energies; next, the organization of his conquered realm had occupied him; but this was a labour for which he had no particular taste, to say nothing of the handicap of being unable to read or write. It was little to be wondered, then, that he was at last yielding to his mystic bias, and permitting himself to believe that he was the possessor of the Absolute Truth with a mission to enlighten, direct, and sanctify the people that he ruled. Out of this conviction had sprung the *Din Ilahi*.

At this point I observed that there was some strangeness in Akbar's reserving a special hatred for the Secret Sects, which did at least refrain from openly challenging his pretensions to a spiritual dictatorship.

'At first sight this may appear inconsistent,' Mabun Das answered; 'but we must remember that Akbar is a man of intuition or feeling, and feelings have a logic of their own — a logic which is often more profound than the logic of reason. It is obviously impossible for Akbar to suppress either Hinduism or Mahommedanism, so he has persuaded himself that these religions, being elementary and partial aspects of his own, are inoffensive. He thus escapes the necessity of regarding the mass of his subjects as insubordinate. But those who follow their own secret path do impugn his authority; indeed, they

commit a double offence. They reaffirm the existence of the Great Mystery which he is by way of having incorporated in himself, and they exclude him from the knowledge of what their worship actually is. As an all-knower Akbar is fanatically intolerant of what is secret. Just as materialists are infuriated by mystics, so is Akbar outraged by any mystery to which he has not given his sanction and his seal. These Secret Sects, standing outside the circle of his light, reduce it to a mere candle-glimmer in the dark. For the unknown, once admitted, encompasses the known and dwarfs it.'

To hear Mabun talk like this was a surprise, but not so great a surprise as it might have been. I had suspected from the beginning that he contained within himself something more than what he had yet shown me.

'All the people in the world, except Buddhists,' I said with a smile, 'can be fitted into two classes: those who proclaim and love mystery, and those who deny and hate it. The Buddhist turns away from mystery. For him it is merely the haze on the horizon, beyond which human vision cannot go.'

Mabun gave me a peculiar look. 'So you turn away from mystery, Rajah? — Well, mystery is dangerous — but to turn away is dangerous too.'

What exactly he meant by this I did not inquire.

'Of course there is another reason why Akbar detests the Secret Sects,' he went on. 'During the last year or so his personal interest in women has declined — declined rather abnormally for a man of his age and temperament. And with this change of life his moral ideas have become correspondingly strict. It is not too much to say that his feelings on certain subjects are so strained and violent that at times he becomes almost insane. One has to study him carefully to discover just what things will irritate the inflamed nerve.'

'The rank and file,' I said, 'accept Akbar's genius without examination as being beyond their comprehension, and on the other hand they dismiss as equally incomprehensible his foibles, his extraordinary departures from common sense.'

Mabun nodded. 'Even those who are in close contact with him make that mistake. They look to see what mood he is in, without ever seeking to understand the mood itself. They all have axes to grind, and regard the Emperor merely as an uncertain factor in their schemes. Even Mobarek looks upon him as nothing more than a tool. The Emperor *as a man* does not interest him.'

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After a moment's hesitation I brought out what I had in my mind. 'Mabun Das,' I said, 'I have been given to understand that Hari Khan is not in favour with the Emperor just now.'

A smile appeared upon my interlocutor's face. 'Do not worry too much about that. The Emperor has a liking for Hari Khan all the same.' He paused. 'As for me, I want you to know that I count both Hari Khan and Gokal among my friends, especially Hari Khan. I took a fancy to him from the first, and during his recent detention at Agra a real friendship grew up between us.'

'I am very glad to hear that,' I replied.

Mabun looked down at the ground and smiled to himself. 'Rajah,' he said unexpectedly, 'I hear that you and Shaik Mobarek are now fast friends.'

I did not quite like his tone. 'Certainly — I have for Mobarek a great respect and liking.'

'The Shaik,' said Mabun, 'is a man of character — also, he has religion. This gives him influence over the Emperor, for both are visionaries. But Akbar is a practical visionary; he keeps much more in touch with actuality, and he may find it unwise to let Mobarek continue to lead him. Mobarek is first and last for the Din Ilahi; the Emperor is first and last for the good of the Empire; he is a realist.'

'Both you and Mobarek belong to the same party,' I said bluntly, 'you both support Prince Daniyal.'

Mabun looked away. 'Mobarek is a visionary,' he said in an even voice. 'I, like the Emperor, am a realist.'

I had another question on my tongue, but it could not be asked. Moreover, Srilata had just appeared on the veranda, thus reminding us that we had been in possession of her garden for an unconscionable time. We got up and joined her.



It was about one o'clock last night when I laid down my pen; but although tired, I felt little disposed for sleep. The air was heavy and electric; two or three brief, sharp showers had recently fallen; a languid breath of damp came in through the open window.

Rising from my desk, I blew out the lamp and looked out into the night. The trees, shrubs, and creepers that made a wall round my little patch of lawn melted invisibly into the sky that was itself invisible, except in those moments when sheet-lightning lit up the great cloud-masses hanging above and silhouetted the motionless curtain of foliage. An outline of fan-shaped palms and heavy, ragged banana leaves then loomed above the warm, dark tangle of vegetation surging beneath. Wind-instruments from a Hindu temple in the distance made a faint liquid sound that was overlaid by the shrilling of crickets, the humming of insects, and the wailing of small owls. The air was saturated with the perfume of night-opening flowers.

I turned from the window, and by the glare of the lightning made my way towards the next room where I slept. As I moved my servant's white-robed figure gleamed out beside me, and he murmured something that I took to be his usual inquiry whether I had any more orders to give. I replied: 'All is well. You can go to bed.' My thoughts, indeed, were far away, and abstractedly I moved into the next room. A small, red-shaded lamp was burning beside my bed. This was contrary to my instructions, for any light attracts the insects of the night. Surprised, I was about to call my servant back again, when something much more inexplicable met my eyes. Lalita, lost apparently in deep and dreamy meditation, was reclining on a divan at the far end of the room. For several moments while I stared at her, she returned my gaze without moving, — at first expressionlessly and then with a gathering smile. When at last she sprang to her feet, it was to come forward with a rush, and hang upon my arm, and let loose a peal of laughter. 'Rajah!' she cried; 'for heaven's sake don't look so unwelcoming, or I shall have to go away! Rajah, you must forgive me, please! I *had* to come. I simply had to come!' And she kept on repeating, 'Rajah, I simply had to come!' in a sort of refrain, while she fell to pacing up and down the room.

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I don't know what reply I made, and she certainly didn't listen to it. She was possessed by a curious preoccupation, and her thoughts seemed to be far away from the words that continued to flow from her lips. 'It's like this nearly every night, and I simply can't bear it? Can *you* sleep when the night is hot and thick and heavy like this? Bagavan has given me some opium, but it does no good. Nothing does any good. And every night is like this — thick and heavy and dead. The lightning flickers, and the moths beat their wings against the walls hour after hour. I can't bear this lightning — without any thunder. It's the silence that is so dreadful, — the silence with nothing but the flapping of the moths against the wall. We have no owls in our park. Perhaps, if there were owls . . .'

She stopped, looked at me, and burst out laughing again. 'I have been watching you through the doorway. Oh yes, I have been here a long time. I told your servant not to disturb you. You look very severe as you write. Is it a book? Are you working out a new philosophy? — It is so pleasant and peaceful here, lying on that divan, I nearly went to sleep.' She paused, but only for a moment. 'No, I didn't really feel sleepy. I was thinking. Over there, in our house — it is impossible to think. The noise, the confusion, and people in and out all the time! You have no conception what the life is like! The others seem to enjoy it, but I am driven almost mad. Unless one's mad enough to enjoy it, it's bound to drive one mad. You must understand what I mean, for you are a Buddhist. Surely you see what I mean? Rajah, it's enough to drive *anyone* mad.'

Her trick of repeating her phrases over and over again has a kind of hypnotic effect. I stood staring at her; — we were looking at one another hard, and, remote as she indeed was from me, somehow I did not feel out of sympathy with her. Going to the window, she stood with her back turned to me, silent for a while. Then she came close up, and this time her voice was sharp and low. 'Rajah, we mustn't be overheard. I have something to tell you. Will you make sure that no one can overhear us? Look in the next room, — Rajah, please! It would be terrible if someone overheard us.'

I went into the next room, which of course was empty; I closed the door to the passage, and then my own door was well. 'You can put your mind at rest. Only one servant sleeps in this house, and he is nowhere near.'

She came up to me again. 'I suppose you think me quite mad. Oh, yes, of course you think me mad.' Shaking her hair back, she

shrugged her shoulders and laughed. I was studying her with more attention now, and she seemed to enjoy my gaze. But I did not like her so well as in the afternoon. Painted, powdered, perfumed, tricked out with jewels and rustling Italian silks, she looked so little a creature deserving of compassion, that my feelings flew to the opposite pole. Moreover, the theatrical element in her behaviour alienated me.

After a moment I think she guessed what was passing in my mind. 'I can't go on until you have told me something,' she said.

'What do you want to know?'

In a low voice she replied: 'I want to know what Ambissa said about me this morning?'

'She said nothing about you. Nothing at all.'

'Do you swear it? I have to know. I have a special reason for asking.'

'She didn't even mention your name.'

'Did she talk about . . .' The sentence remained unfinished. Looking down and away, 'What *did* Ambissa talk about?' she asked.

I smiled. 'My dear Princess . . .'

'Lalita,' she corrected me.

'My dear Lalita, why should I tell you what she talked about?'

'Did she tell you she had divorced Hari?'

After a moment's hesitation, I said: 'Yes.'

Lalita gave a brief laugh. 'She has been keeping it very secret. I only heard by accident. She told you nothing more?'

'No. — At least . . .' Again I hesitated.

She looked at me searchingly. 'I see — It didn't occur to her, I suppose, to tell you that she is going to marry my father?'

I stared, frowning. She snatched at my arm again and clung to it, laughing into my face. 'Yes, she is going to marry father, and she's been keeping that more secret still. You see she hasn't even told *you*. Oh, Rajah, don't you see the whole thing? What a fool I've been! Ambissa's been taking me in. She's been taking everybody in. You, probably, just as much as everyone else. — And she hasn't finished yet.'

Lifting her head, she looked deep into my eyes. 'You're not angry with me? It's no use being angry. I know she's your sister, but — but why should I pretend? I'm so tired of it all. And, you know, I like Ambissa very much in a way. I mean I used to like her . . . but really, after all this . . .'

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She drew away, and flung herself down on my divan. For quite a long while there was silence in the room. I was trying to collect my thoughts, but without much success. Looking through the window, I watched the garden flashing into lurid visibility, then darkening, then flashing out again. I took the red shade off the lamp, and stood in front of Lalita, looking down at her thoughtfully. She smiled. 'I suppose you want to see whether I am lying?'

'Why are you dressed up like this?'

'Have you forgotten that we have a party?'

'Oh yes, of course. — How did you get away?'

'No one saw me. I slipped away.'

I was still puzzled, and quite determined not to encourage her to make an emotional display.

'How long ago did you hear about — about all this?'

'Oh, — not long ago.'

She didn't tell me *how* she had obtained her information, and I abstained from asking her. By some means, I suspected, that she was not very proud of.

After a pause I said: 'I can understand your being startled by this, but I don't quite see what reason you have to be — agitated. (She snorted angrily at this last word.) You yourself are shortly going to be married, which means that you will be leaving your father's house. Mahil, too, has a husband; and as for Parmi she will certainly also be married soon. Besides . . .'

I was interrupted by her springing to her feet. 'My God!' she cried out in a voice of despair, 'how little you understand! Oh, Rajah, you don't in the least understand!' She came up to me again; her eyes were burning, her face set. These mid-Asian women have a quality of independence, self-assertion and violence, which contrasts strongly with the age-long submissiveness of the Hindu. She met my gaze with fierceness at first, then closed her eyes and turned away. 'Well, what does it matter? Nothing is any use now. I shall have to go through with it. — Where is my cloak? Please give me my cloak, Rajah. The palanquin men are outside. I will go home now. . . .' Her voice was dull and hard. She was hunting about the room for her cloak; but presently she remembered that she had not brought one. All at once I felt a stab of pity. Until this moment my mind — or rather my imagination — had failed to take into account the fact that she was about to be married to a man she cordially disliked. My excuse is that I had only Hari's word for it

that she disliked Daniyal. It had been open to me to look upon her as a young woman quite ready to embark upon love-affairs with married men for her amusement, and equally ready to sacrifice that amusement to worldly ambition. But no! that is not quite fair. I am not justified in assuming that she was not really in love with Hari; and if, up there, in that lonely valley in the Hills, what Hari told me was true, on one occasion at any rate she had been ready to sacrifice ambition to love — or at any rate, to a romantic semblance of it. My memory of the part I had played on that night made me now feel slightly guilty — not for preventing the mad adventure, but because I had thrown her back upon this loveless marriage.

With an instinctive movement I placed myself in front of the door. 'No, Lalita,' I said, 'I won't let you go like this. Perhaps I have been slow to understand you, — but you must not misunderstand me. You must wait a moment longer.'

'Rajah, there is a party going on. I shall be missed. You *must* let me go.'

'What did you mean by saying: "Don't you see the whole thing"? What did you mean by accusing Ambissa of taking everybody in?'

She was obstinate, and at the same time preoccupied. 'I must go,' she kept saying. 'I must go.'

Frowning, I stood my ground. For a minute we stared into each other's eyes; then — 'You had better come too,' she said suddenly. 'We can say you were just arriving and that we met each other outside on the veranda — and walked up and down in the Park. Please never tell anyone I came here to-night. Please promise me that!'

Impatiently I reassured her.

'We can both squeeze into my palanquin. Come quick.'

'Very well. But before we leave this house you must explain yourself.'

'Explain myself? — Oh, Rajah!' She gave a little snort of laughter, flung up her arms, and began marching up and down. 'Why do you ask me that? What is the use? I know well enough what you think of me. Oh, yes, of course I know. You think me hysterical. You think I am always. . . . But what does it all matter? As I have said before, you don't understand. You don't realize what I have been through. You don't realize how terribly I dread . . .' Her voice had risen to a wail, but now all at once she let it drop. 'God! If only you understood what Ambissa is responsible for!'

Perplexed and helpless, I followed with my eyes her rapid pacing up and down. Her movements were exactly like those of an animal in a cage. This long-legged, broad-shouldered young woman gave me a curious sense of contact with animal life; the violence of pent-up vitality in her was something to be reckoned with — in terms of simple emotion, and of its power to arouse simple emotion.

All at once she began laughing again, but gently and to herself; she stood still, with narrowed eyes, and laid a hand on my arm. 'Think, Rajah!' she said in a low, quick voice, 'Ambissa is going to be the mother-in-law of the future Emperor! The mother-in-law of the Emperor! Think of it! She paused. 'And you, I suppose, will be uncle-in-law. What a charming family party we shall be! Ambissa has got us all roped in! She has even found the right husband for Parmi, who is to marry Ali. That makes another link, you see. Isn't it splendid, Rajah! Our two families between them will simply rule the roost. Everything will fall to us! We shall have first places at Court, — we shall hold all the best offices, — money and honours will simply roll in.' She gave me an oblique look, and added, 'It's no use your trying to stand out, Rajah. Everything was settled long ago for *you* as well as for the rest of us.'

I hope I didn't let her see the effect her words had on me. I am rather ashamed of the extent to which they took me aback. Why hadn't I exercised my imagination a little more effectively for myself? 'I see,' I said beneath my breath.

'But it all depends on my marrying Daniyal,' she went on with a peculiar smile, 'and a few weeks ago I had decided I wouldn't.'

'And then?'

'And then Ambissa persuaded me to change my mind again.'

'I see.' My eyes were fixed on the ground. 'Thank you, Lalita,' I said at last, 'Now, I suppose, we had better go.'

I led the way out of the house. Her palanquin-bearers had gathered some friends about them, and by the light of their lanterns were playing a betting-game by the roadside. They got up, spat into their hands, and made ready.

'Take four men instead of two,' Lalita said urgently. 'And we don't need a lantern. Tell them to put it out. Give them plenty of money. Tell them to run.'

There was no room on the seat for more than one, so Lalita sat on my knee. On our way I don't think we exchanged a single word. But, when we were about a hundred yards from the house, she told

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the men to stop and put us down. Together we strolled on towards the lights and the voices. On the veranda there was no one, and after running up the steps and looking into the room, she turned back to me and said in a low voice: 'Come!'

From the comparative obscurity of the veranda, we studied the party indoors. On the other side of the room was Ambissa, talking quietly but earnestly to Mobarek, who nodded his head at times, and once burst out laughing and patted her hand. The plump, straight back, her carriage of her head, the slow waving of her fan — all were extraordinarily expressive. As for her face, that hard social mask with its impenetrable eyes, struck me with a certain chill. Not far away, Parmi and Mahil, who had just finished singing, were receiving congratulations on their performance from the Governor and two or three young officers. Bagavan Ranee, the Khan's sister, was talking to Srilata and Smith. The Khan himself, with a jug of wine by his side, was pretending to listen, but I think he was more than half-drunk. A few faces turned in our direction, but my late appearance in Lalita's company did not seem to excite remark.

To my great relief the party broke up very soon, and I was able to go back home to bed.

Thus ended my first day at Kathiapur, and it has left me with a great many disagreeable things to turn over in my mind. Are all my days in this unpleasant little place to be equally rich in complications and entanglements? As my sojourn here threatens to become more prolonged, it becomes in equal measure more distasteful. But I must not go away until I am satisfied that there is no object in my staying any longer. During this time I shall not dare to think — indeed, I *must* not think — about my own future. That I *shall* retire from the world before very long is certain; in the meantime I must possess myself in patience.

The above lines were written at noon. It is now evening, and again I have a good deal to record.

I called on Ambissa early in the afternoon and found her waiting for me in her small, private room. She had a purposeful air, and at first sight gave an appearance of perfect health and serenity. Her face was as smooth and fresh as massage, paint, powder, and a strong will could make it. But the morning light also made visible a kind of inward haggardness. This I put down chiefly to anxiety on Ali's account, for no news of him has yet come in. The maternal instinct in Ambissa is strong. Moreover, her ambitions are so intimately bound up with Ali, that the boy's death would leave them hanging in the air. But it is also true that her ambitions have a mechanical vitality of their own, and that no matter what sorrows overtake her she will live the life of the world to her last breath. I felt a great pity for her, and was glad to be able to say in all honesty that the Governor's apprehensions seemed to me quite unwarranted.

We then began talking about Lalita; and I was struck by the fact that, while she had made no attempt to arouse my compassion in regard to Ali, she now put on sad airs, sighed continually, and blinked as if to keep back tears. 'Yesterday,' she said, 'I couldn't bring myself to tell you what a trial that girl has been to me. But now I really must.'

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'Well, she has taken it into her head again that she won't go up to the Camp.'



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I compressed my lips and looked away. Ambissa's eyes made me suspect that she had got wind of Lalita's midnight visit to my house.

'I expect Mobarek will be able to talk her round,' I replied dryly.

'I think *you* might be able to talk her round.'

'I?'

'Yes. I am sure you could help, Amar. She has a great respect for you, and — and she is the kind of girl who will only listen to a man. I do wish you would use your influence with her.'

'But . . .'

'Listen, Amar! — I daresay you were a little surprised when I wrote to you about a week ago to suggest that Lalita should stay with *you* at Ravi instead of actually staying in the Camp. The fact is that she was then complaining that the Camp tired her too much, that she couldn't get a wink of sleep there, and so on. My suggestion that she should stay with you took the wind out of her sails, you see. In fact, it did more: it acted as a positive inducement.'

'My dear Ambissa, there is a mistake somewhere. Lalita and I are the merest acquaintances. The pleasure of staying in my house could not possibly be strong enough to overcome — could not, I mean, be of any weight.'

'Oh, then she has talked to you about her marriage — about Daniyal?'

'No. Everybody knows she dislikes Daniyal.'

Ambissa was studying me with a speculative eye.

'You see,' she said at last, 'that child has a very difficult temperament. For instance, she thinks she didn't get on very well at the Camp on her last visit. She is over-sensitive, and easily takes offence. One must do all one can to help her, to give her self-confidence. With a little more self-confidence she would be perfectly happy, and able to fill her position quite well. I should like you to talk to Mobarek about this. He is confident that the marriage will be a great success.'

My inward irritation caused me to reply bluntly: 'A success, you mean, from the political point of view. But, personally, I doubt it. The situation might be made more difficult still.'

'Oh?' And Ambissa raised her eyebrows.

'If Lalita were to fall out with her husband, the consequences would be serious. I am quite sure her father would take her part in almost any circumstances. Of all his children she is his favourite,

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and I hear on all sides that she can twist him round her little finger.'

This, I am afraid, was rather malicious, but I wanted to goad Ambissa into greater candour. If she was really intending to marry the Khan, why didn't she tell me so? My words brought a warm flow of blood to her face; her eyes sparkled, as she replied: 'Oh, the Khan is not the man to be twisted round *anyone's* finger, I assure you. You must get to know him better, Amar. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the Empire lies in his hands.' And her already upright back stiffened as she spoke.

I felt a touch of compunction. I bethought me that she had probably persuaded herself that she loved the Khan; and it was no less likely that he fancied that he loved her. Looking at her through this elderly lover's eyes, I saw her as a very well-preserved and handsome woman, and still comparatively young. She would adorn the Khan's various palaces, she would make a perfect hostess, the match was an eminently suitable one; but who could say that it was not a love-match as well?

Ambissa smiled at me sweetly. 'With the Khan — and Mobarek — to guide and help him, Daniyal's character will certainly develop along the right lines. I am sure he will make a kind husband.' She paused. 'But I should like the Prince to come under *your* influence as well. You could supply something that is all your own.'

Now it is when Ambissa says things like this that I have much difficulty in not being positively rude to her. Swallowing down my exasperation, I replied: 'Don't, please, interpret anything that I have said as uncomplimentary to the Khan. His fondness for his children illustrates a charming side of his character; and, if he has no great liking for Daniyal — well, two people less fitted to get on together I have never met. Besides, the Khan is a man of great pride, and — if I am to believe Mobarek — Daniyal has treated him on more than one occasion rather uncivilly. I put it to you: in the event of a quarrel between Lalita and Daniyal . . .'

'There won't be any quarrel, and I can hardly imagine any girl being such a fool. . . .' Ambissa interrupted with some heat, but she managed to check herself and made a fresh start. 'My dear Amar, aren't you rather forgetting what a magnificent marriage this will be for Lalita, and how much she would have to lose by trying to make trouble between her husband and her father? I don't mean to imply that she is worldly-minded, but, believe me, she is

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not wholly blind to the advantage of becoming the wife of the future Emperor. If she has persuaded you that she is. . . .’ And Ambissa ended with a shrug.

I laughed. ‘She has not had much opportunity to persuade me about anything, but . . .’

‘Well?’

‘By all accounts she has a romantic disposition . . . And Daniyal . . .’

Ambissa took a deep breath, and her face changed. ‘Ah yes, I understand.’ She eyed me comprehendingly. ‘Amar, let us be frank. You are thinking about that affair of hers with Hari.’

I feigned astonishment. ‘With Hari, do you say?’

‘Yes, yes! — Listen, Amar!’ She leant forward confidentially. ‘I know all there is to know about Lalita’s past love-affairs — real and imaginary. She herself has told me all about them. Oh yes, my dear, you needn’t look surprised. She has talked to me about Hari by the hour. It may seem odd to you that she should have turned to me, Hari’s wife, for consolation. But there it is! And I think it speaks very well for me that she should have done so.’

I nodded.

‘Hari of course behaved very wrongly. The fact that she was already engaged to the Prince should have deterred him — if nothing else could. They had a flirtation. It was very foolish, and — in the circumstances — very dangerous. Not that it went very far — oh no! But when one is engaged to a Royal Prince . . .’

‘And that romance is now all over?’

Ambissa did not answer at once. Her eyes slid past me, and to give herself time to think she rose and let down one of the sun-blinds. ‘The trouble,’ she said, ‘is that Lalita’s visit to the Camp a couple of months ago upset her a good deal. And then — in order to restore her self-confidence — what did she do but revive the idea that Hari was in love with her still! Some silly girl had told her, I think, that he remained languishing, — and *that*, you see, was more than enough!’

‘I think,’ Ambissa went on, ‘you can now understand one of the reasons I have had for keeping my divorce secret. I have been afraid lest Hari’s new freedom should encourage Lalita to indulge in heaven knows what ridiculous day-dreams.’

‘But . . .’ I broke off, and then a sentiment that I really cannot define won the day. ‘But why shouldn’t she and Hari marry?’ I asked.

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For the second time that afternoon Ambissa flushed, then, conquering her anger, she gave me a strained and patient smile. 'I don't think you can seriously regard Hari as a suitable husband for her — quite apart from . . .'

I remained silent.

'Well!' she continued, once more brisk in tone, 'for about a week Lalita was in a dreadful state of mind. Thank heaven, I was there to comfort her — and talk reason. Like so many spoilt young women she enjoys emotional scenes. However, in the end, she gave up all her nonsense about refusing to marry the Prince. In fact, my dear Amar, if Daniyal were now to turn round and say *he* wouldn't marry *her*, I truly believe she would die of mortification.'

While Ambissa was speaking a question had shot into my mind. 'By the way,' I said, 'when you suggested to her that she should stay in my house, did you contemplate Hari's being there too?'

Ambissa hesitated, then smiled as one confessing the truth. 'I couldn't be sure whether he would be at Ravi or not, but I was convinced that if he *was*, it would do no harm. Lalita would see for herself that he was far from breaking his heart over her.'

'Surely you were taking a considerable risk?'

She looked away, then took a sidelong glance at me, then looked away again. 'I didn't really think he *would* be at Ravi.'

'But you let Lalita think so?'

'Well — yes.'

I was silent and annoyed. It was impossible to tell what was going on in Ambissa's mind. I was wondering what line to take when the sound of girls' voices came in through the open window. We both turned, and there, vivid in the sunlight, were the Khan's three daughters standing in a group about half-way between their house and ours. As usual they were all talking very loud, very impetuously, and all at the same time. I caught the sound of my own name, and was straining my ears to hear more, when Lalita suddenly looked round, said something in a lower tone, and after that their voices all dropped.

Taking a glance at Ambissa, I detected an inward shrinking, and I must confess that I shared, in some degree, her apprehensions, for it looked as if these young women were arranging to deliver an attack upon the two of us together.

At length Lalita detached herself from her sisters and walked resolutely in our direction.

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the marriage — quite readily, I have been told. Nor is that very surprising after all. There is not a girl in the country who doesn't envy you.'

Lalita ignored this; she kept her face turned to me, and, looking straight into my eyes, she said: 'Rajah, I have been a fool. I know that as well as anyone. But the fact remains that Ambissa has been deceiving me. I may marry Daniyal or I may not. We shall see. But . . .' here her voice became shrill with fury, 'But let her understand once and for all that I am not going up to the Camp again. Please make her understand that: — I am not going back to the Camp.'

I inclined my head, and I think she felt that in this at least she would have my support. Looking round at Ambissa, I saw her biting her lips. She was angrier at this moment than she had been yet, and the swelling of the veins in her forehead alarmed me, for her temper, when once out of control, is very violent. It alarmed me, too, to observe that Lalita was meeting her looks with looks almost equally grim. Never again, I reflected, would these two women be able to patch up any but the sorriest semblance of amity, and I felt a flash of sympathy for the poor Khan. The silence which now reigned was a dangerous one, I made haste to be the first to break it.

'Come along, Lalita,' I said, rising. 'You have said your say, and that is enough.'

Stepping in between the two women, I turned to Ambissa. 'Good-bye, I will come again to-morrow morning — unless you would prefer to visit me in my own house?'

Then, without waiting for an answer, I opened the door for Lalita, took her by the elbow, and set her in motion. For the fraction of a second she resisted, then gave a little laugh and walked out.

Together we went slowly across the lawn, and not a word was spoken on the way. On reaching her house, however, she looked up into my face with a smile of genuine amusement.

'I am sorry, Rajah,' she said, and ran up the steps.

As I was leaving the Park, I came upon Srilata. She was walking slowly along with her eyes fixed on the ground; so pensive was she, indeed, that she might have passed me by unawares, had I not stood straight in her path. The moment her gaze fell upon me, however, she assumed an air of cheerful composure; — and this had the effect of putting me out of patience. I often feel that Srilata carries circumspection too far.

In the brief conversation that took place I came near to upbraiding her. It is not flattering to be treated as a fool in whom no confidence is to be placed. I forget how we began, but before half a dozen sentences had been exchanged I found myself saying: 'One thing at least I see clearly, you are all united in a close body behind Daniyal; you all share the same blind confidence in his future — a confidence which seems to rest largely upon the prospect of his marriage to Lalita. But I think you are all being both over-confident and — and . . .' I could not find the word I needed, so I went on: 'Anyhow, I greatly doubt whether the marriage will come off. And I don't think it would be a success, if it did, — not from any point of view.'

Rarely have I spoken more impatiently, and poor Srilata looked quite disconcerted. 'Why do you think the marriage won't come off?' she asked.

'It is only by leaving both Lalita's character and Daniyal's completely out of account, that you all succeed in believing that it will.'

Srilata was not much impressed by this reply; her face took on an air of relief, which of course further annoyed me. As I said nothing, she began talking vaguely about Lalita's character, although it was clear that the subject didn't interest her. Young girls as such do not interest her. It was solely as Daniyal's fiancée that Lalita occupied her attention at all.

Presently, in another burst of irritation, I quoted Lalita's actual words about Daniyal. A cad and the vilest man on earth — that, I said, was what she had called him.

'But she was talking nonsense,' exclaimed Srilata, actually flushing a little. 'And only a very young girl suffering from wounded vanity would ever talk in such a fashion. Daniyal has a witty tongue, and it sometimes runs away with him. He may have *said* one or two

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rather unkind things in the course of his life; but what has he ever done to justify such language on her part? No, no; Lalita is suffering from pique. You see she really isn't at all on Daniyal's intellectual level. I don't think she takes the smallest interest in art or literature; and Daniyal is completely wrapped up in them. His own work,' she added, to protect herself, 'may not be very important (although some of it *I* consider quite charming), but without a doubt he has a whole range of perceptions and appreciations which she is quite unable to share.'

'Poor girl!' said I.

This was not the first time I had noticed that Srilata's taste in human beings had been vitiated by an excessive respect for the shallow intellectualism of her set. She is inclined to think me priggish in that I make no secret of valuing character above wits. But isn't it made plain to us every day that sharp wits and aesthetic sensibilities, where there is no worth of character to control them, turn people into fools or cads, or both? For my part, I cannot but regard Srilata's attitude towards art and literature as a kind of inverted priggery. Man is born to reverence; his spirit cannot but fly upwards; and when he fails to revere great things, he falls into the absurdity of revering small ones. I know people who revere their own petty cynicisms. When Art is great, it is by virtue of something that is not itself; worshipped in and for itself, both it and its worshippers are apt to look a trifle ridiculous. To bicker with Srilata, however, was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. If she tries my patience, I most decidedly try hers. All of a sudden, feeling on both sides that we were behaving like children, we looked at one another and began to laugh. We parted on good terms.

It is after midnight. As usual the atmosphere is heavy and electric; I stare out of the window, and my thoughts flit bat-like to and fro. Thirty minutes ago, I laid down my pen to open three notes which were brought in to me together. One is from Mobarek, and contains astonishingly satisfactory news. He tells me that on all the points upon which I have been standing out on Gokal's behalf the Emperor has given way. Unless Gokal proves unexpectedly hard to satisfy, there need be no more dissension between Akbar and the Brahmins on the subject of the Din Ilahi. I will say no more about this now.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rajah Amar actually continues to discuss the subject at very considerable length.

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The second note is from the Governor, who asks me to come and see him to-morrow afternoon; the third is from Lalita. She tells me that she and her sisters are going for a ride again to-morrow morning, and invites me to accompany them. Shall I do so? — Yes. It is desirable that I should get to know Lalita better.

Our ride did not take place. I woke the next morning with a severe headache and a high fever; but, as an attack of this kind nearly always overtakes me on first coming down from the Hills, I was neither surprised nor alarmed. I knew that in twenty-four hours I should probably be on my feet again.

Lalita and her sisters arrived at my house soon after the sun was up, for we had arranged to avoid the heat of the day. I heard the jingling of their horses' bits, their laughter, then their exclamations of disappointment and commiseration, as Vagira, my servant, told them of my condition. They wanted to come in, but I had foreseen this and given him instructions that on no account were they to be admitted. Lalita left word that she would call again in the evening to see how I was doing.

In the course of the day I received a visit from Srilata, and was feeling so much better that I was able to invite her to stay and talk. 'What I propose to talk about,' I added, 'is *myself*.'

'As you know,' I went on, 'for several years I have cherished the idea that one day I would retire into a monastery; and now — now the moment is very near. This visit of mine to Kathiapur is a preparatory one. My object is to look round me at the world of men and affairs, consider what is best for Sita and Jali, and place their feet upon the right road.'

Srilata was leaning forward with a startled air. 'But you can't go away all of a sudden — especially not just at this time. My dear Amar, how can you think of it?'

'I am not going away all of a sudden, and whatever time I choose is likely to seem ill-chosen.'

Upon this the inevitable discussion arose; but, quicker than might have been expected, Srilata recognized the fixity of my decision. I then pointed out to her that in some respects my departure might make things easier, because Sita, being a woman, might well be able to maintain a neutrality that would not be allowed to me.

As for my own future, the fact that in a few weeks or months I would be a yellow-robed monk with a shaven head and a new name,



sitting in a monastery garden in Ceylon — this fact meant nothing to either her or me at this time. The mind cannot function simultaneously on two different levels of feeling. It meant nothing to either of us at this moment that we should soon be separating for ever; and Srilata showed good taste and good sense in not pretending to be more stirred than she was.

She did, however, point out that I was taking this step unusually early in life. She asked, too, whether I had considered how young Sita was, to be left, not a widow, but husbandless. Her large, dark eyes rested upon me curiously as she spoke, and yet to my reply she seemed to give only one half of her mind. I said, briefly, that when a spiritual call was sufficiently urgent, all mundane considerations became of secondary importance. These words, I knew, would convey little to her; she could see only what I was leaving behind, nothing of that towards which I was moving. My retirement in her eyes was as flat and dull as suicide.

On the other hand, in discussing the future of Sita and Jali she displayed a keen interest. Although she doesn't know Sita well, she is disposed to like her; and I truly believe that on Jali she could easily bestow much of the affection she would have bestowed on a child of her own. We talked for a long time, and now at last I felt that I was getting the best of what she had to give. Quick to understand how deep my concern was for those I was leaving behind, she plunged deep into a consideration of my problems. When I told her I was hoping that it would be possible for Gokal to take his place as Sita's chief counsellor, she asked me a little dubiously whether he would lend himself to a policy favourable to Daniyal. Wasn't he rather unsympathetically inclined not only towards Daniyal but the whole of the Prince's party? I had to admit that this was at present a difficulty; but Gokal, I added, had great powers of detachment; moreover he was a man of remarkable finesse, and no one would be more skilful in steering a difficult course and protecting Sita from intrigues emanating from the Court, or from interference on the part of Ambissa, who would certainly try to get a finger into Sita's affairs as soon as I was out of the way.

Srilata understood my point of view; but she remained, for all that, dubious. Her last words to me, spoken with great earnestness, amounted to this: the fact that I was intending to go away before the conflict between Salim and Daniyal was settled, ought to simplify my decision, because now my personal likes and dislikes, which

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might have been allowed some weight had I been remaining on the scene, should not be permitted to interfere in my judgments. 'And let me add this,' she said. 'You cannot be too careful not to alienate Daniyal. The Prince is very greatly swayed by *his* personal likes and dislikes. Were he to feel unfriendly towards you, his whole attitude toward Sita and Jali might be altered.'

After Srilata's departure I got up and paced to and fro in the garden. My thoughts dwelt upon Sita; for I was slightly disturbed at not having yet received any letter from her. As the evening wore on, I began to think that Lalita wouldn't come after all. My headache and fever had left me, but I felt tired, and at last — at about midnight — I went to bed.

A little later, when already half-asleep, I became aware that a conversation was going on in my sitting-room. The voices were low, but I recognized one as my servant's and the other as Lalita's. Vagira, I supposed, was telling Lalita that she had come too late and consequently could not see me. As I lay there, however, heavy with sleep, I remained conscious that the low talk was continuing. It went on and on, until at last I roused myself; I drew on a robe, and looked through the door that was ajar.

Lalita and Vagira were standing by my writing-table, all the drawers of which to my astonishment were open. Presently they moved to an adjoining room, and I heard all the drawers and cupboards in that room being opened one after another. Going into the sitting-room, I waited for their return.

'Ah!' cried Lalita, as she came back, 'so you were not asleep after all, Rajah!' Her voice expressed the greatest satisfaction. 'I am dreadfully sorry to have come so late,' she added.

I sent Vagira for some tea and sweetmeats.

She pointed to my writing-table. 'I am glad you keep no papers there, Rajah. Vagira tells me that you have chests of your own, locked, and with secret drawers. You are wise. In this town there are no papers or letters that the Governor doesn't read.'

She laughed. She seemed to be rather excited. 'Do you know what I was doing in the other room?'

'What, I wonder?'

'I was looking for something I might have left behind. Did you know that our first night in Kathiapur was spent in this house? And that room was my bedroom. The room you are sleeping in was

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occupied by Mahil and Parmi. Parmi spilt a bottle of scent into the bed. Do you smell it at night?’

‘I did. I had the bed changed.’

She laughed. ‘I have found one of the things I left behind.’ And she held out a tightly-closed hand. ‘Are you curious?’

‘You want me to say yes.’

‘Perhaps you are not curious enough,’ she replied with a touch of malice.

Vagira came in with the tea. While he was arranging the tray, Lalita sat opposite, her grey-green eyes resting on me thoughtfully. She was dressed more simply to-night in a robe flowing from neck to ankle, but caught in by the girdle of the hill-women, which defines the line of the hips. The dress was of a purple so dark as to be almost black, and the girdle of black plaited horsehair hung down in front with long tassels of dark green and gold. Her necklace and ear-rings were of jade green. Unobservant of these things as a rule, on this occasion I noticed her dress because it made her look different.

‘Do you know my country, Rajah?’

I shook my head.

‘Ah! You should see my country! You should see it in the Spring. There is no Spring anywhere in the world like the Spring in the high valleys of Turkestan.’

I thought of the Springtime in the Caucasus. I thought of Sita.

‘Do you believe in our shamans, Rajah?’

‘Of course not.’

She looked offended. ‘You have never met them.’

‘No.’

‘They can tell you what you want to know. — Is there nothing you want to know?’

I laughed.

‘Wouldn’t you like to know what Sita is doing at this very moment?’

‘As a matter of fact I have been thinking about Sita a good deal to-day. I was expecting a letter from her.’

‘Shall I tell you what Sita is doing? And Jali?’

I began to suspect what she was about, and I frowned. But she was not looking at me. She had picked up a small bowl that contained sweetmeats, and, emptying them out on the table, she filled the bowl with water from a jar.

‘I want you to hold this for me on your knees,’ she said. ‘Yes,

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like that. And now . . .' She threw herself down on the floor beside me, and opening her hand, showed me what lay in the palm. It was a small black oblong cake of a substance that might have been opium. 'Dried dragon's blood!' she said laughingly, and, breaking the cake in two, threw the smaller part into the water, which she began stirring with her middle finger, whilst she murmured some gibberish under her breath.

'I am sorry you are so superstitious,' I said.

She looked up at me with serious eyes. 'Everyone who knows our shamans believes in them. If they had told you the things they have told me, you would believe in them too. Do you know what they are like? They are dwarfs, and very merry, and very dirty. One cannot help liking them, although they sometimes do wicked things. They are not wicked like Daniyal.'

I felt that this was not the time to argue, nor could I stop the performance that had already begun. The hold that Shamanism has upon even the most enlightened of Lalita's countrymen is quite astonishing.

Under Lalita's stirring the water in the bowl became first pink, then a muddy crimson, and at last so thickly red as to look like fresh blood. 'What do you say to that?' said she, putting her finger into her mouth first, and then wiping it on her handkerchief.

'It is a kind of chinese ink, mixed with powdered chalk. I should have thought you could have told that by the taste.'

'Oh no, Rajah, dragon's blood!' she cried out, laughing excitedly. 'It is, it is!' Getting up, she took a few steps to the window and stood looking out. 'Anyhow, it doesn't much matter, does it? The question is: What shall I see in the bowl?' I became uneasily aware that she was struggling with a certain agitation; nor did it require much perspicacity to guess that this agitation was caused by the things that she had already prepared to say.

At last she gave a shiver, came slowly back, and knelt once more on the floor at my feet. 'I want you to look into the bowl with me.'

For a few moments I did so, then drew back. Her arms resting upon my knees, her face almost touching the surface of the water, she remained silent for two or three minutes; her shoulders beneath the thin silk of her dress were heaving very noticeably

'I see the lake, and Ali crossing the lake.' One of her hands tightened upon my thigh; she lifted her head and gave me a veiled look. 'That means he is not dead.'

## RAJAH AMAR

I said nothing,

'Aren't you glad?'

'I have never thought he was dead.'

She bent down again, and there was another long silence. 'I have been seeing Daniyal,' she said without looking up; 'but I can't tell you all that I have seen. . . .'

'That is enough, then,' I said. But, although no longer looking into the bowl, she continued to lean upon me with her arms, and I was constrained to keep still.

'I suppose you know how violently Daniyal hates you?' she said, still without moving.

'Hates me! Nonsense. Why should he? He doesn't trouble his head about me at all.'

'Of course he hates you.'

'Owing to the Dantawat incident? For having been by way of saving his life?'

'He hated you long before that.'

'I think you must be mistaken. We had hardly ever met.'

'Don't you remember the evening when he called at your father's house, and went round the room looking at the pictures and the furniture?'

'Now how on earth . . . ?' I began and then stopped. Obviously either Hari or one of the Prince's gentlemen-in-waiting had taken the trouble to give Lalita a description of that evening. But what trifles people take the trouble to report! One's surprise, on these occasions, is always proportionate to the insignificance of the matter reported.

Still in the same muffled voice Lalita went on. 'Daniyal is less stupid in some ways than you think, Rajah. Do you imagine he didn't see how much you were despising him?'

Again I was quite taken aback. 'You imply that my manners are very bad. Or that I am singularly inefficient at hiding my feelings.'

'I think you are often unaware of what people are thinking about you. And you evidently don't understand Daniyal in the very least. He is frightfully sensitive as well as frightfully petty, and — unlike you — he is also frightfully cunning. *He* knows well enough what you are like. Quite apart from that evening, five minutes in your company would be enough to make him hate you like poison.'

Is it possible that Lalita is right? I shall have to think about this.

'What does Ranee Sita think of Daniyal?' she inquired suddenly.

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'Sita doesn't know him.'

'I think she does know him — now.'

'What do you mean?'

'When I first looked into the bowl I saw Ali crossing the lake. He was coming to your house. And then I saw another boat crossing, and in it were Daniyal and several friends of his '

'They were going to my house, do you say?'

'Yes.'

'Go on.'

'You understand, Rajah, that I only see glimpses of things — a scene here and there, — then the bowl clouds over again. I can't tell you all that has happened. But for one moment I saw Sita, Jali, Ali and Hari, all together. Then I saw Hari and Ali alone, and Hari was beginning to get angry, — and then Sita came in and pointed to the lake. And the next thing I saw was Daniyal walking up to the house, and Sita standing in the door to receive him.'

'And Hari, where was he?'

'He was standing behind Sita — with Ali.'

Lalita was now calm, but her voice was low and strained. My own heart, I must admit, was beating rather harder than usual. Either this was all nonsense, or Lalita, having just received a letter from the Camp, was amusing herself by mystifying me. I felt a certain annoyance.

'When exactly did this visit of Daniyal's take place?'

'The day before yesterday.'

This answer staggered me, because, if what she said was true, it was impossible that she should have received the news by ordinary means.

'I think we shall find that it took place earlier, if it took place at all.'

'No. It took place the day before yesterday.'

'Have you told Ambissa that Ali is alive?' I asked.

The question caused her to betray herself. She gave just a tiny shake of the head which showed me that her knowledge, or pretended knowledge, of Ali's existence, did not date from just a few minutes ago. However, the next moment she said quickly:

'How could I have told her? I have only just seen Ali in the bowl. Or rather, I did see him once before, but was not sure I recognized him. Do you think I ought to tell Ambissa? I am afraid she wouldn't think what I say is worth believing.'

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'Say nothing,' I replied shortly.

After a minute she sat upright, but the bowl was still on my knees, and she still kept one arm firmly across them.

'I could tell you some more,' she said, giving me a challenging look.

'I have heard enough. I don't believe in your magic, and you know it, Lalita.'

Her face did not change. 'Wouldn't you like to know something more — about Ranee Sita? or Jali? or Hari?'

I made no reply, and all at once she took the bowl, got up, and emptied it out of the window. Her expression was now one of intense preoccupation, the eyes widely open, the brows slightly knit. She began walking up and down the room.

After a while, halting in front of me, 'Rajah,' she said, 'I am glad you didn't see the faces of Daniyal and his friends, as they were sailing back across the lake . . . They were laughing, Rajah!'

'All this is nonsense,' I said with an air of finality. 'You are indulging your fancies too much, my dear. I don't want to hear any more.'

Her eyes narrowed as she looked at me. 'Is it only my fancy that Daniyal is wicked?'

I made a gesture.

'Is it only my fancy that I love Hari?' She paused, then turned away. 'I love him! I love him! I love him!'

Still I remained silent.

She sat down on the divan and stared at the floor. Except for a curious twitching of her nostrils, she was motionless.

'Do you love Sita? Do you love her?' she asked in a dull voice. 'I do.'

She gave a little laugh.

'Lalita,' I said suddenly. 'What is the meaning of all this? What do you want?'

'I want you to take me to Ravi.'

'Now at once?'

'Now at once.'

'But why?'

'Because you must — you must!'

'But a few hours ago you were refusing to go there. And if you go to Ravi — I mean to my house — you will be close to the Camp. You will have to spend your time in the Camp.'

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She kept her eyes fixed on the ground. 'You *must* take me there,' she said obstinately. 'You must. You must.'

'But how can I while Hari is there? You have made it impossible for me. I don't know what your ideas are, but I can't in any case be a party to. . . .'

Whilst I was hesitating, she threw back her head and gave a laugh.

'Have you any reason to believe that Hari is still in love with you?' I put this question in a perfectly matter-of-fact way.

'Yes, I *know* he loves me,' she murmured.

'How do you know?'

'I have had letters.'

'Letters! That is very unwise.'

'I meant to bring a letter of his — to show you. But it has disappeared.'

'Good God!' I cried. 'Don't you realize how serious that is?'

'I don't know . . . The Governor probably has it, — in which case it really doesn't much matter. In fact, if it were to stop that man from making love to me, it might be a good thing.' She began laughing again. 'Last night it came into my head that I might have left it in one of the drawers here. I was looking for it when you first came in. But no! I couldn't really have been as careless as that,' she added reflectively. 'I can't understand it at all.'

I turned, went to the window and looked out into the night. I had some very difficult thinking to do. The truth is this: my memory had resuscitated a vague and momentary impression which I had received in Ambissa's room the day before. I seemed to remember that in letting down the sun-blind she had brushed some papers off her desk on to the floor, and that the corner of one of the papers thus disturbed had revealed a piece of Hari's handwriting. I seemed to remember having said to myself: 'No, that can't be Hari's writing, but it is very like it.'

'When did you lose this letter?' I asked.

'I only missed it to-day.'

'Are any other letters of his missing?'

She hesitated, then said: 'No.'

'When was the letter written?'

'From Agra — towards the end of his time there.'

'Was it the kind of letter, which — if it fell into the wrong hands . . . ?'



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'Yes, it certainly was!' She laughed. 'It showed that he still loves me. It was on account of me that he insulted Daniyal and got sent to prison.'

I asked no more questions, although Lalita's answers left me far from believing that I had reached the truth.

'Will you take me to Ravi?' She had fallen back into her state of preoccupation and was speaking in the low, strained, monotonous voice that always accompanied it. 'Will you take me there, Rajah? Will you take me there at once? Please, Rajah, at once!'

'My dear child, it is impossible.'

'But if I arrange it, will you take me?' She got up and laid her hands on my shoulders. 'Rajah, it is terribly important. Much more important than you know.'

I cannot tell what was in my mind during those moments, while she continued to supplicate. We were looking straight into each other's eyes with a curious absence of self-consciousness — a curious preoccupation — with what I cannot say.

'I must see you again,' I said, and disengaged myself and moved away.

'Yes. To-morrow.' And with that, abruptly, she made ready to go. 'We have arranged to ride again to-morrow morning. You must come. Will you be well enough to come? I shall want to show you something.'

Show me something? I had no idea what she was talking about; but I said I would come. She went away in a hurry, leaving behind her the half cake of 'dragon's blood'.

THE next morning I rose at daybreak. My night had been full of dreams and presentiments, nor was I surprised when a messenger arrived with a letter from Sita. I opened it hastily, and found that it contained a confirmation of all that Lalita had told me. I examined the seal; it was intact. I counted the hours the messenger had taken, and was more puzzled than ever by Lalita's performance of the evening before.

But to turn to the news itself. It appears that Ali, having heard that his father had arrived at my house, came across the lake to obtain permission to accompany Daniyal up to his hunting-lodge, some twenty miles farther up the valley. All had gone well between him and Hari at first, but after a while Sita heard Hari's voice raised in anger, and, following a decision she had already made, she lost no time in joining them. They were on the veranda; she stepped out of the door, and then it was — but I will use her own words: 'And then it was that I received the surprise of my life, for, coming up the garden path, was an unbelievably sleek young man dressed in sky-blue and silver, and behind him were two other men in pink and gold, and a woman swathed in flowered muslins. I could only stand and gape, my astonishment making me quite forget that I myself was in one of my oldest dresses, with my hair in disorder and my hands covered with mud, for I had been planting some new irises in the water-garden. Hari had to pull me by the sleeve and whisper in my ear: "Daniyal!" before I recovered my senses. Why didn't you ever tell me what a comic figure the Prince is? I didn't know whether to retire into the shades of the zenana or do the honours of the house for you. I think I should have turned and run, had there been time; but the next moment the Prince was bowing low before me. Then he turned to Hari, and him he greeted with a quite disconcerting effusiveness. Ali he patted on the shoulder. To my intense relief Hari behaved very well; he joked with the Prince, and was very gallant with the lady. In fact he and she embarked almost at once on a flirtation, and presently he took her off to look at the water-garden. The Prince sat with me on the veranda, drank some of our home-made sherbet (which, as you know, has a very odd taste), and pretended to like it. I can't tell you how dreadful

he was in spite of his politeness. But fortunately Hari and his lady soon came back, and then the Prince took Hari by the arm and they strolled round to the front of the house "to see the view over the lake". What passed between them I don't know; I can only tell you that they still appeared quite friendly on their return, and that Ali was allowed to go back with the Prince. If this is to be the last that Hari and Ali will ever have to do with one another — well, that is not my business. Anyhow, I am thankful that Ali is not *our* son. Jali sends you his love. He has not been very well these last few days. But it is nothing to worry about.'

This letter has left me a little uneasy. The more I think about it, the more I feel that a good deal is left unsaid. Besides, the tone is certainly not quite natural. This morning I was not given time to read it as carefully as I should have liked, for a few moments after its arrival Vagira came in to say that Lalita was waiting for me outside.

I found her on horseback in the road, and my own mount stood there too. She appeared to be in the best of spirits, but I detected a watchfulness in her eyes, and after a moment she said: 'Ambissa had news of Ali early this morning. The Governor sent word to her that he was safe.'

'I, too, have had a letter,' I said.

'From Sita?'

'Yes.'

We both paused. Mahil and Parmi were coming down the road, and there was not time to say much more.

Lalita leant down over her horse's neck. 'The things that I told you — do you find they are true?'

'Yes.'

I said this in a tone of voice that made her feel uncomfortable. 'You think there is some trickery,' she muttered. 'And you are angry.'

'No, no. — We will talk about it later.'

I got on to my horse, and the next moment we were all cantering out of the town. Our way ran along a dyke under the spur of the hill that runs steeply up on the south of Kathiapur and juts out for two or three miles into the plain. The country in front of us as far as the eye could see was flat and green — green with the delicate colouring of young crops. For a quarter of an hour we went on thus, then the hill came to an abrupt end, and the new view that

opened out took me entirely by surprise. In this direction the plain became a desert. Right up to the distant southern horizon there was nothing but hard, pebbly sand. And a hot dry wind came off this sand, — a wind that was delicious to me after the enervating air of Kathiapur. I gave my horse a touch of the spur and was off at a gallop.

It was not long before the three girls drew abreast of me, and after about ten minutes of galloping we came gradually to a halt. Already, to all appearances, we were in the midst of the desert, for a blue haze hung over the damp lands that we had left behind, veiling them from view. Overhead, the sky was streaked with thin, lofty clouds, which the sun, still low on the horizon, tinted faintly with pink and gold. The silence was broken only by the heavy breathing of our mounts. After a few minutes my horse began snuffing after tufts of a sweet herb that grew scantily here and there and I let him take me a little apart. Thoughts of the future had sprung suddenly into my mind; with an unwonted pang I reflected that in Ceylon there would be no more of this: no more riding over the desert, no more delight in physical energy, never again the feel of hot, dry air rushing past one's face . . . I should possess profounder joys, but life — life would already be a thing of the past.

Strange it was that at this period in my life I should have reverted — even for a moment — to such emotions as these.

Looking at my companions, who stood silhouetted against the east, I marvelled at the nobility of those living forms. On this bare, level earth, under this pale, lofty sky, the forms of horses and riders had a noble — if inexplicable — significance. The present was full of beauty for me, — a beauty which was not impaired but enhanced, when I perceived, coiled up upon a flat rock close beside me, one of the largest poisonous snakes that I had ever seen.

Leaving her sisters, Lalita rode up to me, and together we moved slowly towards some low rocky bluffs, under which, about three miles away, I descried a ragged encampment.

'Did you see that snake on the rock?' she asked, and when I told her I had, she went on, 'My brothers would have killed it.'

'Yes. But they are not Buddhists.'

She laughed. 'We have no name for our religion. But we believe in Powers of Good and Evil. My brothers have killed not only snakes but men.'

To this I said nothing.

'Some men are more evil than snakes; don't you think so, Rajah?'

I could guess what was coming; I said nothing.

'What about killing Daniyal? Would you blame anyone for doing that?' She was laughing as she spoke, but the next moment she stopped abruptly. 'Was I right in saying that Sita had been visited by Daniyal?'

I nodded.

'And did she like him? Tell me, did she like him? I can see by your face what she thought of him. Oh yes, you don't need to tell me. I know. I know.'

We rode on in silence for a while. Her eyes were fixed upon the encampment in front of us, and I got the impression that this was her goal. We had not gone much farther, however, before I stopped and made her stop too. Sniffing the air, I said: 'You are not proposing to take me any nearer, I hope?'

'Oh, but you are a Buddhist. You don't mind. . . .'

'I am a Buddhist certainly; but why should I offend my sense of cleanliness? Why should I approach nearer to people who eat carrion?'

'They're not Aghoris,' she murmured, slightly disconcerted.

'Perhaps not, but they are low enough.'

From a distance of five hundred yards the encampment polluted the air; my eyes, too, told me that everything there was filthy; the children who were running out to look at us were covered with unwashed sores.

I looked at Lalita with curiosity. 'Are you in the habit of coming here? And, if so, why?'

Mahil and Parmi had joined us, and the three sisters exchanged glances. 'I don't come here,' said Mahil, and gave a yawn. Parmi smiled enigmatically into my face, and her smile was that of a child.

'I have brought you here to show you something,' Lalita cried out in a voice of irritation. 'Go away!' she added, turning to her sisters. 'I want to be alone with the Rajah. Go and wait over there.'

For several minutes she and I sat on our horses in silence, staring at the ragged huts. At last an adult figure emerged, looked at us, and disappeared again. The existence of an encampment of outcasts in such a place as this struck me as exceedingly odd. Neither food nor water nor employment appeared to be available here, and yet the place showed signs of having been occupied for some

time. Curiosity made me ride a little closer; and then an old woman came out from among the tents, and hurried up to us with a broad smile. In her hand under the folds of her voluminous and filthy garments she carried something with a good deal of care. Lalita greeted her like an old friend, dismounted, and introduced me as one from whom there was nothing to conceal. Reassured, the old woman took from under her dress a cup half-full of what Lalita called dragon's blood, planted it firmly in the sand, squatted down over it, and, pulling a hood over her bowed head, became completely still. Lalita crouched down beside her and waited. Soon a voice came through the folds of the hood, but I was unable to hear what was being said. In order to show that I was taking no part in the proceedings, I moved a little way off.

I was gazing absent-mindedly before me, when two pigeons, flying very fast, appeared over the bluff. After circling round once, they alighted somewhere amongst the tents, and almost at once an idea flashed into my mind. They were carrier pigeons! and Lalita's second-sight was explained. While she obviously obtained her information from the old woman, it was now equally obvious that the old woman obtained hers from these birds. But the mystery of the encampment remained, and I was still puzzling about it, when my eye fell upon two men who were strolling along under the bluffs. One, a tall man, I recognized almost at once as the Governor; the other I did not recognize until they had drawn much nearer, and then, to my surprise, I saw that it was Mabun Das. The reason I had not made him out before was that, if not disguised, he had at any rate made himself look very different. Instead of the costume proper to his office he was wearing a dress that would have passed inconspicuously in any bazaar crowd. Seeing that Lalita was too much engrossed by the old woman to observe their approach, I gave her a call. She lifted her head, a look of annoyance passed over her face, and, after saying something to her companion, she got up and came towards me. The other got up, too, gathered herself together and shuffled off towards the tents. A few seconds later the four of us were chatting together, while a groom rode up to take charge of our horses. Then I fell into step beside Mabun Das who led me in the direction of the bluffs, Lalita and the Governor remaining behind.

We sat down on a rock in a gully behind the encampment. Here, in the shade and to windward of the tents, the air was cool and

sweet. I waited with no little curiosity for what Mabun Das would say. He took counsel with himself for a few moments, eyeing me with a faint smile, and tapping nervously with slim fingers upon his knee. 'Rajah,' he said at last, 'it was no part of my plan, to meet you here like this. But now that it has happened, I'm not sorry. No, no!' And in his gentle, purring voice he began telling me what I needed to know. 'As you are probably aware, I am responsible for the security of the Camp; and what you see here' — he waved his hand towards the tents — 'is a part of my arrangements for keeping myself well informed. These people are runners, and in combination with them I have a service of carrier-pigeons.' He paused. 'I like to keep the existence of this place more or less secret, so I should be glad if you would say nothing to anyone about it — or about having met me here.'

I nodded, and, after we had talked a few minutes more, he seemed to come to a sudden decision. Laying a hand upon my arm, 'My dear Rajah,' he said, 'allow me to give you a word of warning. Don't leave your family at Ravi very much longer. Salim, as you know, has commenced operations on the plain; and the possibilities of a raid in that direction, although remote, are not altogether negligible.'

'How promptly should I act?'

'Oh, there is no great hurry. But I think you would do well to move within the next three or four weeks.'

I looked at him wonderingly; and my look was full of interrogations; but all that he did was to smile and add: 'Not a word of this to anyone, please!'

A silence fell between us. I stared out over the plain.

At last with intentional bluntness, I made the remark: 'Of course, then, the Prince will be leaving the Camp quite soon?'

Mabun Das held up a hand and waved it slowly before my face. 'Never mind what Prince Daniyal does — or does not do. Take the advice of a friend, and do not stay up there too long.'

The possible implications of this last sentence were so astonishing that I could not embark upon a consideration of them. Another silence fell between us, during which Mabun Das kept his eyes fixed upon me, stroked his moustache, and appeared to be deliberating. When he next spoke, it was in a brisk and matter-of-fact tone.

'Of course, the world thinks I am a partisan of Daniyal's. I am officially supporting his party — that's true enough! I have appear-

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ances to keep up. Yes! And if — ' he laughed gently — 'if you were to go back now and tell the world that I am a traitor to Daniyal's party, no one would believe you. No, not a soul, excepting, possibly . . .' He broke off. 'Anyhow, Rajah, I trust you to keep your own counsel. You may do so without any qualms. Trust my good sense and my good intentions, just as I trust yours.'

With that he got up, and our conversation was over.

About our ride home I have nothing to say. On reaching my house I invited my companions to come in, for we were all four hot and thirsty, — and Vagira has the secret of a delicious beverage — an infusion of mountain-herbs, which he sharpens with lime-juice and sweetens with black honey. To me this return into the atmosphere of Kathiapur was like plunging into one of the steamy jungles of the Deccan; and in my rooms the heaviness of the air was intensified by a languid scent which the three young girls were using for the first time, — a present from the Governor. Their thin silks clinging to their warm, moist, golden bodies, they lounged about and chattered; and I — I watched them. Suddenly transported out of the present, I felt weary not only of life but of my efforts to be liberated from it. Nirvana, I thought, alas, how far away!

And now again, in this room that is still faintly redolent of their presence, I separate myself, I strain towards my former solitariness, which was a step towards the solitude of the immutable.

Even these few days of contact with the world have left their mark upon me. A depressing sense of isolation enfolds me. Or perhaps I should say that the isolation into which I have been gradually withdrawing myself has suddenly turned into loneliness. Gokal my most intimate friend, and Sita my wife, both seem to be far removed — and by what I hardly know, unless it be fundamental differences of temperament, outlook, ideal, and hope. There is no current of human sympathy flowing between myself and the rest of mankind. I still hold firm to my decisions — but not easily, not without doubts. Once more the fascination of Being uncoils like Kundalini within me. Life's energies and desires fascinate me — not as temptations but as mysteries.

As an energy of the inscrutable Maya, by far the most interesting of the three girls is Lalita, for it is in emotion that the flesh and the spirit unite to create that beauty which is this earth's last lure. Sometimes I think that Woman as Woman is irretrievably bound to



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the Wheel. Yet surely in Sita emotion has never been a blind tempest, nor womanhood a hidden, persistent domination. — No, no! a flower-scented wind in the face of the wayfarer — surely Sita knows that love is no more than that? And I, have I not passed beyond it? Have I not climbed into the region of snows? Am I not nearing the dark? Am I not in sight of the last needle-tip of ice, beyond which there is nothing?

*Here the Rajah's diary breaks off, and there is a considerable lapse of time before it begins again. At this point, therefore, I continue the narrative in my own words.*

THE moon, almost full, was blurred by tenuous clouds, and a mist hung in white layers about the little town. The tangled trees of the Rajah's garden stood motionless in the milky obscurity. From beyond — from deep in the sacred grove — there came the tap-tapping of a stick upon the ground, where someone was making his way along the snake-infested path to the Hindu temple.

Round and about the Rajah's house, in and out through the open door, glided Vagira, moving restlessly, thoughtfully, and silently, on bare feet. Sometimes he peered across the garden into the darkness beyond, sometimes he stopped and listened, sometimes he crept round the side of the house to watch the under-servants who were loitering round the embers of a cooking-fire. At last he went out on to the road, and stood, gazing up and down, as if he was expecting someone. But all this was merely restlessness.

Presently an old man came drifting along, stopped, and wished Vagira good-night. He spoke little above a whisper, and was answered in the same tone. The two stood looking up at the moon which hung above, a pale blurred disc.

'Your master's fever,' said the old man, 'I doubt not, it is worse.' Vagira made a gesture that might have meant anything.

'Kathiapur,' said the old man, 'is a place where men die easily.'

'And live easily too,' said Vagira.

'Yes; it is a place where men live easily, love easily, and die easily.'

'What could be more satisfactory than that?' said Vagira.

'It is the climate,' said the old man. 'And you are lucky not to be here in the bad season, for then the insects, especially moths and butterflies, fill the air, the fat kine in the pastures turn and gore one another, fishes float belly-up in the ponds, and the burning-ground is like a forest, so many are the columns of smoke going up into the air. The smoke rises twice the height of a tall tree and there spreads out into a roof, upon which sit ghouls and vampires of different sorts, which can be plainly seen at night by anyone who looks down from the hill-slope yonder. Many a night I have watched them

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copulating by the hour. To-night the moon is hardly bright enough to make the climb worth while.'

'What you tell me is most interesting,' returned Vagira with politeness. 'But my duties, I fear, would in any case prevent me from leaving the house.'

'How long does the Maharajah intend to stay here?'

'Not long, I think.'

'For him that is fortunate. In this climate . . .'

'Good-night,' said Vagira, stepping back through the little gate. 'I congratulate you on having survived the climate for so many estimable years.'

'I was born here,' said the old man simply. 'And to the dung-beetle the dung-hill is . . .'

But Vagira was gone; he had slipped back into the house and was peeping in between the curtains into the sitting-room, where the Rajah was seated at his writing-table. 'He sits for many minutes without writing a word,' said Vagira to himself. 'That again is a bad sign.'

Going a little way down a side-passage, he squatted on his heels in the dark and continued along a vein of unquiet thought. All the evening the Rajah had been particularly easy in manner and speech. He had worn a contented look, moved about with an air of relaxation, chatted at his meal. 'All this is bad,' thought Vagira. 'It is thus that he tries to deceive not only others, but himself.'

All at once there was the sound of voices in the road, and Vagira sprang to his feet. He was standing in the porch as the Governor mounted the steps, and beside him — somewhat to Vagira's surprise — there came a small wizened yogi. Vagira bowed low, the bow hiding a face of contemptuous dislike. After a moment of well-concealed reluctance he ushered both visitors into his master's presence, and withdrew — but no farther than the other side of the curtain.

The Rajah, the Governor and the yogi sat together and talked. The room was in semi-darkness, the red-shaded lamps giving very little light. All three were fanning themselves, and their fans, as they went to and fro, beat against the fat moths that streamed in through the window. The Rajah's face was pale and his eyes had a glitter; his tone was amiable, almost playful, and Vagira listened to it with dismay.

Opposite to him sat the Governor, who, although shabbily — not

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to say strangely — dressed, was bearing himself with more than his usual swagger. The little yogi, crouching low on his chair, turned his head from side to side to study the faces of each speaker in turn; his sharp, beady eyes, the forward poke of his neck, made him the very picture of malevolent attentiveness.

‘Vagira!’ the Rajah called out; and, after creeping back for a few yards, Vagira pattered audibly towards the door and entered.

‘Yes,’ the Governor was saying, ‘we now suspect that the murdered man was Prince Dantawat. He had been given datura. Under the influence of the drug he might have wandered far; he might have committed any folly. Whoever intended to murder him gave him the drug first in order to confuse subsequent investigation. This trick, as you know, is very common.’

‘Bring something to drink,’ said the Rajah, and Vagira bowed and went out.

To conceal from his guests the fact that they were most unwelcome was causing the Rajah an effort which he felt to be almost beyond his strength. His head was aching, the pains in his back were intense, but worst of all was the strain of keeping his mind in contact with reality instead of letting it wander in delirium.

Presently, to his surprise, he heard the yogi explicitly charging Daniyal with the responsibility for Dantawat’s murder. Who was this little man, and why had the Governor brought him? Never before had he seen a human being the whites of whose eyes were so brilliantly yellow. Whilst the yogi was talking, he fixed upon him a look of polite interest; but whatever object his eyes rested on for more than a moment enlarged itself until it occupied the whole field of his vision. The result was nightmarish.

‘Bah!’ said the Governor, laughing coarsely. ‘What does it matter! The Prince had already changed Dantawat from a young man of good health and fabulous wealth into a penniless and besotted idiot. If he finished his work by causing him to be murdered, so much the better. The case of Dantawat from first to last is without any importance. If I disapprove of Prince Daniyal, it is on weightier grounds.’

‘On weightier grounds!’ The yogi nodded solemnly. ‘And so does Pundit Gokal — on weightier grounds.’

The Rajah suppressed a movement of surprise, but not quickly enough to escape the yogi’s notice.

‘Pundit Gokal is an old friend of mine,’ he said, giving the Rajah

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a sour look. 'On my way through Ravi I had a long talk with him.'

The Rajah, inclining his head with courtesy, exclaimed inwardly: 'An old friend! Never!'

'A long talk!' the yogi repeated with an air of challenge. 'And Pundit Gokal suggested that I should tell you what we talked about.'

'I shall be very interested . . .'

'We talked on the subject of religion.'

The Rajah inclined his head again. He was thinking that the conversation threatened to become quite intolerable, for he now felt quite sure that both his guests were drunk.

'We found that we were substantially in agreement,' the yogi added with a spiteful leer. 'That girl Gunevati has taught your friend a good deal.'

At this the Governor gave a loud guffaw, then drew himself up and assumed an air of dignity.

There was a pause. The yogi seemed to have lost the thread of his ideas. At last he said: 'As you have perhaps already heard, I was able to give the Pundit some medicine that will certainly cure him.'

The Governor nodded. 'That is true. Gokal is already very much better.'

'Very much better,' echoed the yogi. 'I saw him twice. The first time alone. The second time Hari Khan was there too.' He waited a moment, then added: 'And I also saw Ranee Sita.'

The Rajah smiled politely. 'It is remarkable that you should have been able to discover just the right medicine for Gokal.'

The yogi assumed a majestic air. 'I live in contact with reality.' 'Ah!' said the Rajah.

A snigger came from the Governor. After throwing a venomous glance at him, the yogi pronounced once more: 'I live in contact with reality.'

The Rajah leant forward over the tray. 'Let me give you a little more sherbet?'

'No thank you,' returned the yogi sourly. 'I was able to doctor Pundit Gokal so successfully, because I got the right medicine from the woman who supplied the poison — an old woman who belongs to the . . .'

'Hush, hush!' interrupted the Governor.

'From an old woman who — who lives at Khanjo. Hari Khan could not get anything out of her. You certainly . . .' he held up a trembling finger — 'would have got nothing out of her. Those who

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do not live in contact with reality can do nothing — nothing to promote either evil or good.'

'That,' said Amar, 'is true.'

'But you don't mean it,' said the yogi rudely. 'You mean something different.'

'Surely,' said Amar politely, 'there are different levels of reality. The reality which I am striving to . . .'

'Spirit and flesh are one,' said the yogi, as if enunciating a new truth. And the Governor leant forward in his chair, looked at each of the disputants in turn and grinned with amusement.

'Pundit Gokal and I agreed on that point,' said the yogi complacently.

'Yes, they agreed on that point,' echoed the Governor, and again he guffawed — but this time with amiable intention.

'There is only one religion that is real,' said the yogi, his voice rising shrilly. 'Only one that proclaims the spiritual truth which actual life exemplifies. When you want to know a man's religion, do you ask him what it is?'

'Well, that would be one way of approach,' said Amar.

The yogi gave a slow, cunning smile. 'A man's words are nothing. I watch a man's behaviour. I read his thoughts and his desires. The true religion of a man is that which he lives, — and that which all men live is the religion of Creativity, the religion of Sex. Knowingly or unknowingly all men worship Woman, and all women worship Man. To understand this in its simplicity is to grasp the truth; to grasp truth is to be in contact with reality; and to be in contact with reality is power.'

'Rajah!' said the Governor with sudden fire. 'That man' — and he pointed to the yogi with his foot — 'that man is right.'

There was a silence, in which Amar groaned inwardly. How was he to bring this visit to an end without giving offence?

'Rajah!' the Governor went on, 'the Din Ilahi is a thing of emptiness and air. And Prince Daniyal supports it because he is nothing more than flatulence himself. Islam is a fine religion in its way, it gives sex pre-eminence. I have no quarrel with Islam, nor with Prince Salim. But the true religion . . .'

'The true religion,' the yogi broke in, 'is that which has run like a hidden vein of gold through the history of this country from the earliest times. Underneath all the shams and inventions of false shame, pedantry, and hypocrisy, there has lived amongst us Hindus

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the ancient verity that Sexuality and Religion are one. You, Rajah, are an ascetic, and it may pain you to listen to these words; nevertheless in your asceticism you recognize their truth. Chastity is a noble way of recognizing the divinity of Sex. But there are other ways.'

Here the Governor, who had been fixing the yogi with admiration and approval, rose and struck his breast. 'I would die for my religion. I would willingly die for the Great Goddess. — And,' he added with a sudden drop into bitterness, 'I very likely shall.'

Gloomily he sat down again, and in so doing broke the fan with which Amar had supplied him. 'The movements he made in trying to pick up the pieces showed the Rajah that he was under the influence of drugs rather than drink.

'I offend you,' he went on after a pause, 'but I offend you less than Prince Daniyal, — because he is corruption itself. I offend you less than the hosts of the godless. — This creature here — I beg your pardon, yogi! — this yogi is more remarkable than you think. You should see him . . .' He broke off and grinned.

The yogi, after a moment's hesitation, grinned too. 'If he likes to come to the temple, where there are girls . . .'

The Rajah put his hand to his brow. 'Alas!' he began, 'I very greatly fear . . .'

The yogi threw out an arm. 'I know, you have fever. You have a headache. But I will cure you.'

Searching in the folds of his robe, he produced a little wooden box, from which he took two pills. 'Swallow these — unless you are afraid.'

The Rajah took them in the palm of his hand. 'You say they will cure me?'

'Yes.'

The Rajah tilted his head back and swallowed the pills.

'In three minutes,' said the yogi, 'you will feel well.'

There was a silence. And then from outside the Hindu temple in the grove a louder music floated into the room. The Rajah listened to it with interest; it was different from what he had heard on the other nights. He noticed his two guests exchange glances.

'We must be going,' said the Governor in a changed voice. 'I think,' he added, as if supplying the reason, 'I think Princess Lalita is coming to pay you a visit.'

The Rajah was lying back with closed eyes. His headache had

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left him, and it seemed that his fever was leaving him too; but he did not feel drugged.

‘Yes, you have cured me.’ He looked at the yogi curiously. ‘It is very remarkable.’

‘Here is another pill,’ said the yogi. ‘This will finish the good work.’

The Rajah took it, looked at it, and said: ‘Another medicine?’

‘For Kundalini,’ said the yogi, grinning.

The Rajah swallowed the pill. ‘I have reason to be very grateful to you. I feared that I was in for several days of sickness. Is the relief temporary or permanent?’

‘I am not a magician; I am a realist. — Your fever will return, because it is in your blood, but less severely.’ He put some more pills into the Rajah’s hand. ‘If you will take these to-morrow, you will soon be well.’



AFTER his guests had left him the Rajah stood looking down at Sita's letter, which lay upon the writing-table. Several times during the afternoon he had picked up his pen to answer it, but something had stood in the way. He read the letter over again, trying to find what it was that struck him as unspontaneous and unnatural.

The glimmer of a lantern showed among the trees at the bottom of his garden, and he heard the tapping of a stick on the ground. 'It is those men on their way to the temple,' he thought. 'What Vagira told me about that temple is obviously true. — The yogi is a clever doctor. Cleverness and meanness too often go together. The music of that temple has beauty. I wonder how far away it is . . . I think the instruments must be inside — all excepting one, that faint wind instrument, which is not quite like . . .'

After listening for several minutes, he called:

'Vagira!'

'My Lord?'

'Have you been down to that temple?'

'By day, my Lord — yes.'

'There is a ceremony to-night?'

'Yes, my Lord.'

The Rajah walked up and down the room. 'I have been given some medicine that has cured me — at any rate, temporarily. I had a touch of fever. — What do I hear being played outside the temple? Three hundred yards away? What is it?'

'It is a flute, played by the leper who sits outside.'

'Why a leper?' said the Rajah dreamily.

'Perhaps because he is already half an animal; his face is the face of a tiger, as must always be. He lives in a hut in the grove, and the priests feed him.'

'Have you entered the temple?'

'God forbid! Inside it at this moment they are playing music that is forbidden by the law; but the temple has very thick walls and triple doors, and the music within cannot be heard.'

'The path to the temple lies at the bottom of this garden?'

'Yes, my Lord.'

'Bring me something to drink, well cooled with snow.'

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Vagira withdrew.

The Rajah suddenly took note of the fact that one part of his brain was very clear. 'The other part of it,' he thought, 'is dreaming, but I can watch my dreams as one watches a play. The last pill given to me by the yogi was very likely an aphrodisiac. I thought it at the time. Poor fool! He probably considers himself a very humorous fellow.'

The Rajah went into the next room, and out into the garden.

'My Lord! My Lord!' called Vagira hurrying after him across the lawn.

'I am going to the bottom of the garden. The music inside the temple is so muffled that from here I can hardly hear it.'

'But you cannot hear it at all, my Lord — neither from here nor from the bottom of the garden. Nor must you proceed until I have driven away the snakes.'

'I can see well enough not to tread on snakes. But do as you please.'

The Rajah turned back, leant against a pillar of the veranda and looked up at the moon which had grown larger and more yellow. The music from inside the temple struck him as very curious, and the little, faint flute outside had a sweetness that was devoid of melancholy, because wholly impersonal.

There came into the Rajah's mind a vivid memory of the music that had been played in the Christian Church of the little town in the Caucasus, where he had married Sita. The contrast made him smile; and his smile deepened as he recalled how startled he had been at the time. What a volume of sound! And how simple and barbaric! And yet it gave pleasure to people who were quite cultivated in their way. He remembered the round fresh strong voices of ruddy-cheeked children; and the booming and roaring of big, bearded men. And afterwards, on coming out of the dark, incense-dim, re-echoing church into the quiet, clean-smelling air, how dazed he had felt! Fourteen years ago, and Sita had then been eighteen! Pink-cheeked like a child, and clear-eyed, and slender, and with what a gentle buoyancy of spirit. There had been frost upon the grass under the trees. There had been almond-blossom lower down in the valley. Crispness and brilliance. . . .

'The garden is now safe, my Lord.'

'Thank you, Vagira.'

The Rajah walked up and down very slowly on the coarse grass,

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which had recently been cropped by sheep. Presently, picking up the lantern that Vagira had left on the veranda steps, he crossed the lawn and made his way down the narrow path through the trees. He reached a broken-down fence of interwoven palm-leaves on the other side of which ran the track to the temple. Putting his lantern down, he leant against a tree-trunk and fell yet deeper into thought. He saw quite clearly now that already after the first four years of their married life he had begun to detach himself from Sita. And this process had been inevitable, for he had been straining towards something that lay beyond human relationships. Had this marriage been for her good? — or for his?

The leper's tune had changed. Perhaps, too, the temple doors had been thrown open, for a fuller music came through the trees, and forthwith the Rajah lost the sequence of his thoughts. 'Sita,' he murmured, 'I have loved you; let that suffice! No memories now! The time has passed; youth has passed. Let me cling to the truth — *my* truth. But what can that truth be which women seek?

'Certainly there is a beauty in women's nature which is not the beauty of men's. And the difference is not merely a difference of colour, but of essence. In a world filled with the brutality, the harshness, the pedantry, and the hypocrisies of men, are not women a saving grace, and a fragrance and a light?'

From the house there came the sound of people talking. The Rajah drew himself away from the tree-trunk, staggered slightly, and began walking back along the tunnel-like path to the house.

Two forms were visible from across the lawn. 'Lalita?' he called out.

'Yes, Rajah. It's me.' And the girl advanced to meet him.

'I wish we could stay out here!' she said, as they stood side by side in the middle of the lawn, looking up at the moon.

'If you like . . .'

'No.' Her voice was lowered. 'We couldn't be sure that we were not being overheard.'

Together they went indoors. The little sitting-room was oppressively hot. Lalita went up to the tray.

'No palm-wine? Only sherbet and fruit-juice? I should like some palm-wine.' She gave a little laugh. 'Or, better still, some rice-spirit.'

Amar made a sign to Vagira, who was hovering in the doorway, and as soon as he had gone, Lalita came up to him and said in an

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undertone: 'When Vagira comes back will you please send him somewhere where he can't possibly overhear us. — Rajah, answer!' And she pulled at his sleeve.

'I beg your pardon; I was listening to the music.'

'What music?'

'The temple music.'

Lalita listened for a minute. 'I can't hear anything.'

Vagira came in, and set down some decanters on the tray.

'Please close the outer doors,' said Amar, 'and then go upstairs to your room, and stay there till I call.'

Vagira bowed and withdrew.

'Yes. I hear it now,' said Lalita. 'But it is very faint. You must have extraordinarily good hearing.'

Amar knit his brows. 'Have you put on more scent than usual?'

'No.'

'My senses are very acute to-night.' He smiled. 'And I think I know why.'

Lalita was not listening; she went to the doorway and peered down each passage in turn. Meanwhile the Rajah poured out some palm-wine, which he handed to her. .

'Thank you. — It so often happens that I forget myself and begin shouting.' She laughed. 'And anyhow, this is a country of eavesdroppers. You can't deny that, can you, Rajah?'

She took him by the arm and drew him to the window. 'How dark it looks outside. Most likely the garden is already full of people listening.' And she laughed again.

As they were leaning out together over the sill, he felt her body warm against his. He felt her leaning more and more heavily. 'I, too, am thirsty,' he said, and to give himself an excuse for moving he went and poured out another glass of palm-wine.

Lalita remained by the window. Looking at her, the Rajah thought: 'How greatly she values her beauty! How deeply she lives in it, how unceasing her consciousness of it! But it will fade, and then what? The strange thing is that the answer to this question is the very reverse to what one would expect.'

Lalita moved away from the window. 'I am no good at intrigue, she said suddenly, 'but when Ambissa and my father came to me this afternoon to persuade me to go up to the Camp, I pretended for about an hour that nothing would induce me to go. Then, when Ambissa suggested again that I should stay with you, I gave a

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grudging consent. Poor Rajah! You will soon have my father and Ambissa both beseeching you to take me in.'

She was now standing by his writing-table. 'What is it that you write here for so many hours at a time?'

'My journal.'

'Shall you put down what we are saying to-night?'

'Yes.'

'I wonder.'

'I shall put it all down.'

'Ah! You say that in order to . . .' She turned away.

'Do you write your thoughts down as well?' she asked in a low voice.

'Some of them.'

She gave a little laugh that was slightly mocking. 'You can't write them *all* down. I tried once. It is impossible.'

She fell into a muse. As he looked at her, a wave of admiration swept over him. Taking flesh and spirit together as one, he found her somehow beautiful; and this in spite of her being self-centred, vain, and engrossed by the emotions arising out of sex.

'The trouble is that you don't believe anything I say.' She lifted her head to give him a smile. 'To begin with, let me tell you about the dragon's blood. . . .'

'Oh, never mind about that!' he interrupted.

'Very well. But when I am with the old woman I really do see things in the bowl. It is stupid not to believe in second-sight. So many people have the gift. Parmi, for instance, can see much more than I.' She paused. 'Do you know why, Rajah?'

'Why?'

'Because she is a virgin.'

The Rajah's face was expressionless. 'The old woman gets her news from carrier-pigeons,' he said.

'Some of it. I know. But not all. And not knowledge of the future.'

There was a pause. He noticed her breast rising and falling. She poured herself out some rice-spirit and drank it quickly.

'Do you attach much value to chastity?' she asked.

'I believe,' he answered slowly, 'that there are certain spiritual experiences which the unchaste cannot obtain.'

Abruptly, and as it were involuntarily, she gave a loud, mocking laugh. 'There are also certain spiritual experiences that the chaste cannot obtain.'

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After a moment she came up to him — so close that he could see the perspiration standing out upon her temples. 'So you believe in chastity,' she murmured. 'And Sita too?' She was looking down through half-closed lids. The Rajah made no reply.

'You don't believe in my love for Hari,' she said quickly, 'nor in his for me.'

'I think you have both been very strongly attracted to one another.'

'Have been? — Do you know that I have been his mistress?'

'No.'

'And you doubt it now. — That evening in the Hills after you had stopped Hari from coming to my tent — how do you know I didn't go to his?'

'I don't think you did.'

'And how do you know I wasn't his mistress before that? — As a matter of fact I was. Long before.'

'Let us drop this, Lalita.'

'Very well.' There was a note of anger in her voice. 'Shall we talk about Sita?'

'If you like.'

'I saw her for a moment at the Court — in Agra. I thought she was lovely.' These last words were spoken in a low voice and sadly.

'Are you aware that her mind is set on religion — no less firmly than mine?'

Lalita gave the Rajah a peculiar smile.

'My dear child,' he said after a pause, 'I am going to tell you something about myself.' Again he paused, his looks were thoughtful, and he passed his hand over his brow. 'Briefly, it is this: I am going to retire completely from the world. In a few weeks I shall be setting out for Ceylon, where I shall go into a monastery — and so end my days.'

Lalita's eyes, which had opened widely, rested upon him in a horrified stare. 'In a few weeks?' she murmured.

'A very few weeks.' And then, most strangely, he found himself saying: 'Perhaps even in a few days.'

Lalita had grown very pale, and her eyes continued to fix him in the same unblinking stare. He managed to maintain his gentle, kindly smile, although his heart was now beating hard.

Lalita suddenly looked haggard. 'You can't do that! You can't do that!' she muttered.

The Rajah said nothing, but kept his gentle smile.

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‘You don’t understand . . . How can you leave Sita? You told me you loved her.’

‘Yes. I do. — We love each other, but she agrees that I must follow my path.’

‘She agrees!’ Lalita caught up the words with a wince of pain.

For a few moments she kept an ominous stillness, then said: ‘Sita is in love with Hari.’

The Rajah received this with perfect quiet. ‘I was afraid you might be imagining something of that kind,’ he said gently. ‘But let me assure you . . .’

‘Fool!’ said Lalita under her breath, and turned quickly away.

Whilst Lalita’s face was turned away, the Rajah’s gaze rested upon her with a look that was cold, hard, and calculating.

‘Hari has been very deeply attached to Sita for some time,’ he said, and his voice was gentleness itself. ‘She gave him sympathy and comfort when he was feeling unhappy on account of you. But, believe me . . .’

Lalita gave a cry, and wheeled round again.

‘Rajah!’ she said in a low, hurried voice, ‘Sita is still young — not much more than thirty, I think? And she is lovely. And — and surely she must still want to be loved? Don’t you understand what I mean, Rajah? How can you leave her just now? You can’t really believe that she . . .’

The Rajah, looking past her, compressed his lips. ‘People are not all as you think,’ he said dryly, then paused, and went on in a gentler tone. ‘If you knew Sita as well as I do, you would understand better how it is that I am able to take this step. The way that she has been following — the ways she intends to follow — are not really very different from mine.’

Lalita shook her head.

‘Sita,’ continued the Rajah, ‘has a longing for saintliness, a longing which you at your present . . .’

Lalita raised her head; her jaw was clenched, with the lips drawn back. She opened her mouth to say: ‘That’s enough. Sita has been Hari’s mistress for some time. And I think you should know it.’

The Rajah gave her a look of cold rage, and made a sound of contemptuous disbelief.

‘I know it! I know it!’ Lalita cried; and suddenly, walking up and down the room, she began to laugh. ‘Of course she’s his mistress. I should have known it without their all telling me. It began

at Khanjo; then there was an interval; and now they have begun again. Now they are alone together in your house. And you — you stop here — talking!

The Rajah, very pale, was looking at her with the same hard, calculating eyes. With a trembling hand Lalita poured herself out some more rice-spirit and drank.

‘I didn’t want to tell you, but I had to at last. Don’t you see that you can’t let all these things go on? You can’t want me to marry that loathsome cad Daniyal, when I love Hari, and Hari really loves me. You can’t really want Daniyal to become Emperor of India, you can’t really want me to help him on to the Throne. You can’t approve of Ambissa’s divorcing Hari — just in order to spite him, and because she wants to become the mother-in-law of the future Emperor. Answer me, Rajah!’ And, as Amar remained silent, she went on: ‘Hari only makes love to Sita, because I’m not there. You can’t let him go on. You can’t leave all these things to happen! They are abominable. — Don’t you see that you can stop everything by helping me to run away with Hari? Take me to Ravi and then you will see for yourself whether I am speaking the truth or not. For God’s sake, take me to Ravi, Rajah! Hari admires Sita, — he worships her, if you like; but she is not his kind. You know it, Rajah, as well as I. But Hari and I, we are of the same kind — the same hopeless kind — and you must let us go to perdition in our own way.’

The Rajah stood quite still for a minute after she had finished, and his expression was indecipherable. Then he moved about the room, absent-mindedly, as if looking for something. She watched him with a look of terrible anxiety in her eyes.

‘Listen, my dear Lalita,’ he said at last, and his voice was calm. ‘I don’t want to say anything to wound you, but . . .’ He stopped. He seemed to be mustering all his resources. Gradually his face assumed a look of kindness. ‘Lalita, my dear child,’ he began afresh. ‘Forgive me for saying that the feeling you cherish for Hari at this moment is very largely artificial. It is a reaction from your dislike of Daniyal. And your feeling about Daniyal has also been undergoing a great deal of exaggeration and distortion in your mind of late. It is not necessary nor inevitable that you should hate Daniyal as you now fancy you do. You are romanticizing the whole situation. This is especially evident in your persuading yourself that Hari is still in love with you, and that Sita is in love with him. All that is nonsense. — And as for the rest of the picture you have drawn,



it is so extravagantly coloured, so grossly distorted, that it ceases to be anything like the truth. No doubt Hari has made love — and is now making love, if you like — to Sita. But where is the woman that he does not make love to? No doubt there are times when you regret having dismissed him, but — your love for him, Lalita, was never deep enough to cause you to break off your engagement to Daniyal, and . . .’ Here the Rajah made a pause — ‘I feel pretty sure that you have never at any time been Hari’s mistress. There is a serious element of untruth in all that you have been saying. And you have been deceiving yourself with your own misrepresentations. In regard to Sita in particular, you are inexcusably and wilfully wrong. You have absolutely no grounds for saying . . . You have no reason to believe . . . that she has given way to Hari. And even if there is gossip to that effect, gossip is no evidence of truth. Perhaps that old woman with her dragon’s blood has been inflaming your imagination with wild tales; very likely she has been cunning enough to invent just what was most likely to agitate you, and make you give her more gold. Your fancy has been running riot; it is time you checked it. Look reality in the face! Your marriage to Daniyal will not be ideal, but you knew that six months ago, when you became engaged. No doubt you then argued that Daniyal would not obtrude himself upon you as a husband, and that your position as Empress would bring compensations. Nothing of any importance has happened in the meantime to afford grounds for a change of view. Has Hari really sent you ardent love-letters? I venture to doubt it. He may have written once, but that doesn’t mean much. In any case; he is *not* languishing Lalita, you must come back to reality.’

During this speech of the Rajah’s Lalita had not stirred. Alone her expression had changed. Little by little the light had gone out of her face, which now looked heavy and dull — and almost ugly in its dull heaviness. She looked down and clenched her teeth. For a moment the Rajah thought she was going to reply, but no words came, and presently she walked slowly to the door. The Rajah followed her. They went out, and through the hall and down the steps into the road.

As she stepped into the palanquin, he took her hand and pressed it. ‘Lalita . . .’ he began; but she caught her breath and cried out to the runners to start. The Rajah fell back. For a minute he stood in the road looking after the retreating palanquin, then went back into the house.

Two days later the Rajah was on his way back to Ravi, and this time he was travelling on horseback and without companions. Riding ahead of his train, he was able to give himself up to musings that were often so deep that, had he suddenly asked himself what he was thinking about, he could scarcely have found an answer.

Lalita he had not seen again. During the whole of his last day at Kathiapur he had remained in his own house, but there he had been visited in turn by Srilata, Mobarek, and Ambissa. Srilata had gone far towards convincing him that Ambissa's divorce from Hari was not to be interpreted discredibly; and as for Hari's banishment, that, she said, would certainly come to an end with Lalita's marriage to Daniyal, which would also end the existing crisis. At first Amar had hesitated to accept this view; but Mobarek, when he came, had given her his support. Finally, at the end of the day, Ambissa had bustled in with the tidings that the programme of festivities at the Camp had been definitely abandoned, and that the Prince would very soon join Lalita in Kathiapur. As for the girl herself, she had 'quite got over her attack of nerves, and was now 'perfectly reasonable'.

All this was eminently satisfactory. The Rajah had been able to leave Kathiapur with the feeling that a longer stay was unnecessary — perhaps even undesirable.

The forest through which he was now travelling reminded him of the ride from Khanjo to Ravi that he had taken with Hari some four months ago. Well he remembered that damp, silent, windless path under the tall trees, and how, as he had ridden in front wrapped in meditation, he had gradually become conscious of Hari's eyes fixed upon his back. Once again Hari's personality became intensely vivid to him. As clearly as if Hari had been at his side, he saw that figure, sparsely and not inelegantly sturdy, that well-shaped head and rather broad face, in which the eyes were set widely apart. Had he, he asked himself, had he already suspected in those early days that Hari was under the influence of Sita's charm? Was it on that account that he had disclosed his intention to retire from the world? It had been a talk full of unspoken tussling, temperament struggling silently against temperament; and he had been conscious

of a cold, impassible strength in himself, and the power to quench and make still. Yes, after a little while the fire had gone out of Hari; for, just as a python is powerless to exert its strength unless anchored to some rock or tree, so did man depend upon his grip on reality. Reality had a cold breath that extinguished the fire of all emotions that did not take proper account of it. Poor fools, the Governor and the yogi, who counted him no realist! Could he not have taken the fire out of them too? Could he not have bleached and wilted their vain fancies — even as he had bleached and wilted those of Hari — and of Lalita?

Then, in the midst of these thoughts, he suddenly reined in his horse, drew in his breath, and frowned. He realized that his face had been distorted by a cold and cruel smile. O grace of the Enlightened One! What anger, what ill-will, was there not lurking within him? Had he, indeed, enjoyed crushing Lalita?

For a while he brooded upon this, then cried out within himself: 'What has become of my solitude — my communings in an immense heaven of calm, when the world was seen from so great a distance as to be small and silent? By what fatal weaknesses have I been snared? Alas, not only by jealousy and anger, but by doubt. I am filled with confusion and speculation where no confusion or speculation should be. Invasive and insistent, persuasive and clinging, appealing to pity, piteous with the transient beauty and animal pathos of Maya, such is the feminine spirit. To detach oneself from women is wisdom, but to fly from them is cowardice. Am I not thankful that there is no place even for love in Nirvana?'

This unrest inspired him with a craving for self-sufficingness such as he had never known before. His longing for solitude, for withdrawal, for peace, was overwhelming. And yet, at night, between dreaming and waking, he found himself composing letters to Sita, the emotional tone of which embarrassed him whenever a memory of them drifted across his consciousness during the day. 'Sita, my beloved,' he would say, 'how can I leave you without making you understand? I love you, and must pour out my love as a libation — down to the last drop. This I now do for your sake, that you may see the extent of my love; this I must do for my own sake, for I have to go my way emptied of all earthly passions. Only the love that is unearthly can I retain, the love that is an aspect of the Eternal contemplating itself. And you — although you do not recognize the Way, your Spirit nevertheless is advancing towards the Goal.'

The detection of a hidden dream-activity within him, his dim consciousness that he was following underground trains of thought, inspired him with an anxiety that sometimes rose to the pitch of terror. Ignorance was one of the heaviest fetters of the spirit; and what ignorance could be more dangerous than that of one's own hidden mind? 'While my hidden mind is uncoiling like a slow serpent what have I to do? What dare I do but follow the dictates of my will? And my will must be guided by such knowledge as I have. Yet both will and knowledge seem to me to give very little real power.'

On the day of his arrival at the last stage of his journey it had been raining; a great storm had swept over that part of the forest in the night. Daniyal's guest-house — the one in which he had first met Smith — was glistening in the afternoon sun; the trees round it were still dripping, and from the ground there rose a gentle steam. Gone were the pink rhododendron flowers that had carpeted the earth on his last visit; indeed, the whole place wore an altered, storm-swept look. The fall of three great trees had enlarged the clearing and let in a good deal more light. From the broken trunks and torn branches there came a smell of resin which hung in the warm moist air.

Reflecting that he was now actually not more than fifteen miles from his own house, he wondered how his garden had fared, and whether Sita had not passed a very disturbed night. She must have been listening to the roar of the wind, afraid for the security of Hari and Gokal, — and yet their tents, to be sure, were pitched in so sheltered a spot that no tempest could do them much harm.

Beside his camp-fire, the evening before, he had come to the decision that he would go — not to his own house, but to the Camp. 'From there,' he said to himself, 'I shall send a message to Gokal, asking him to come to me. He and I must talk together before anything else is done.'

But even as he was making this decision he was seized with a keen desire to go straight home. Not to do so made him feel like an outcast and an exile. There even came into his mind the fantastic idea of spying upon the house and grounds from the hill at the back. From there, he reflected, he would be able to look down upon Gokal lying in the sun outside his tent, and Sita busy in the garden, and Jali, and Hari . . . He would see them all — as they were when he

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was not there. And to see people under such conditions — or to see any man as he is when he believes himself to be quite alone — is more than the fulfilment of a special curiosity; it is the indulgence of an unrighteous craving after secret knowledge and the power that such knowledge brings. Mabun Das, thought the Rajah, had too many opportunities for indulging this craving, and could scarcely fail to be corrupted by it. For a while his thoughts rested uneasily upon Mabun Das; then he rose, and, after visiting Vagira, who was down with fever, went to his own room and stretched himself out on his bed.

He had not been there long before the guest-house was astir with fresh arrivals, and he recognized the voice and laugh of Churaman. A keen curiosity to learn from Churaman whether he had been one of the young men who had accompanied Daniyal on his visit to Sita was held in check by an equally sharp disinclination to renew his acquaintance with Churaman at all. He found himself wondering once more what it was that Daniyal had been laughing about on his way back over the lake; and again he drew himself up with annoyance. The voices, male and female, that came through the thin partition awakened vivid memories of the afternoon that he had spent with Daniyal at the Camp; he decided that he would have his evening meal served in his room.

Dusk fell, and gradually, as he lay there, it was borne in upon him that he was once again in the grip of fever. His thoughts became more and more disordered, until at last he lost himself in delirious dreams.

When next he returned to a consciousness of his surroundings it was to realize that a considerable period of time had elapsed, and that he had become very weak.

'This has been a really bad attack,' he said to himself. 'I wonder how many days I have been lying here.'

There was someone in the room outside the range of his vision. 'Vagira!' he called feebly.

The answer came in a brisk, cheerful voice. 'Yes, here I am.' And Churaman's bulky figure appeared beside the bed.

Amar looked up at him, dismayed.

'Vagira has not recovered yet,' Churaman went on. 'But you, I can see, are well on the mend.'

'How long have I been here?'

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‘Two days.’

The Rajah closed his eyes, drank what Churaman held to his lips, and then with a sigh of weariness went to sleep again.

The next day when he awoke it was to feel himself truly convalescent. He sent for Churaman and said: ‘I am surprised at Vagira’s not having dispatched a message to my wife. Is he still very ill?’

Churaman hesitated. ‘I am sorry to say he is dead.’

The Rajah closed his eyes again. Between him and Vagira there had never been much speech, but the bond of affection had been none the less strong for that.

‘Rajah,’ said Churaman, sitting down on the foot of the bed, ‘I congratulate you on your quick recovery. You will be able to continue your journey in a day or two, provided that the weather improves. For the last two days it has been almost impossible to travel. That is why I have abstained from sending a message to Rancee Sita to tell her you were lying ill here. In the circumstances I felt you would rather I did not disturb her peace of mind to no purpose. You were not sufficiently ill. . . .’

The Rajah stopped him by holding up his hand. ‘You were quite right. Nor do I wish her to be sent for now.’

As he lay in bed, he allowed his thoughts to wander. It was dark and dreary in this little room, with the rain drumming on the roof, and a southing of the wind in the trees. The death of Vagira and a sense of separation from home and kith and kin brought his spirits to a very low ebb; nevertheless he dwelt upon his loneliness with satisfaction, thinking that if he were to die, here in this inn, unconsidered, without any of the attentions commonly accorded to one of his rank, or the comfort of friends and family, or the brotherly ministrations of fellow-priests in a monastery — if he were to die like this, it would be a good death, offering him an opportunity to atone by humility and fortitude for some of the many errors of his past life.

The next day Churaman came in to pay him a farewell visit, for the weather had so far improved that he and his friends had decided to resume their journey to Kathiapur. In the course of the ensuing conversation it came out that Churaman *had* accompanied Daniyal upon his visit to Sita, and that he had subsequently been sent over as a messenger to her with an invitation to visit the Camp. This invitation had been accepted, and Sita had been entertained at luncheon by the Prince.

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'In the afternoon,' continued Churaman, 'I had the pleasure of escorting Ranee Sita back across the lake, and she invited me to come up to the house. There we found Hari Khan and Gokal deep in conversation with a yogi who had come down from Khanjo, where he had been visiting his brother.'

'I know the man,' said Amar. 'I met him at Kathiapur.'

Churaman paused a moment, then said: 'Do you know, Rajah, I consider him a rather dangerous fellow.'

'Dangerous?'

'I mean indiscreet.'

At this moment, given a little encouragement, Churaman might have said more; but Amar smiled and changed the subject; and before very long good-byes were exchanged.

Churaman's departure left the Rajah meditative. 'During the last three days,' he said to himself, 'that man has given proof of the greatest kindness of heart; and what he has done for me he would have done for almost anyone else with a greater natural readiness. What conclusions am I to draw?'

The next day he was carried in a palanquin up to the Camp, and there he took up his quarters in Mobarek's house.

ALL the morning it had rained; the afternoon was dull and dark. Clinging to a cloak that he had thrown about him, the Rajah stepped out into the blustering wind and looked up into a sky craggy with torn and ruinous clouds. All was grey, save in one place where a patch of gentle blue appeared beyond the wrack. The lake was rough, and the opposite shore no more than a blur upon the mist.

Going down to the water, he waited, gazing in the direction where Gokal's boat would appear. Soon he saw it — an indistinct, lonely speck; and the thought that this was Gokal, coming to him in answer to his call, made his heart swell with an unexpected emotion. 'Perhaps,' said he to himself, 'I have never realized until now the depth of my affection for that man.' His memory went back to the Gokal of fifteen years ago, a big man, well covered with flesh, but vigorous in spite of his sedentariness, — a man, too, with a head that both looked, and was, a fitting complement to the massive body beneath. There were many years of serene friendship to pass under review, before Gokal had fallen a victim to melancholy; and Amar sighed, thinking how it was simply as an escape from that melancholy that his friend had at last suffered himself to fall under the spell of Gunevati. During the last six months how sadly Gokal had changed! In that little boat there crouched a heavy-bodied, ill-complexioned man, whose eyes held a look of repressed anguish. Yet, even in Gokal as he now was, there lived a noble spirit, and his mind, although neglected and ill-used, was still, the Rajah believed, essentially unspoilt.

Turning, he cast a glance over the rain-drenched promenade. It was deserted, and the houses behind looked derelict. Scarcely could he bring himself to believe that the Camp still contained Daniyal and the greater part of his company.

A few minutes later the boat came in to the jetty, and Amar examining Gokal with anxiety, found him looking very much better than he had dared to hope. In their greetings the two men betrayed a certain self-consciousness, but all at once, moved by a common impulse, they embraced — a thing they had not done for many years. The wind was behind them as they made their way up to the



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house. Exchanging superficial news, they walked slowly, half afraid of the privacy that was awaiting them indoors.

Before entering, Gokal stopped and cast his eyes about him. 'Have you heard the local legend concerning the shores of this lake?'

'Yes. It is said to be studded with ruins that lie buried beneath the silt.'

'Hardly ruins! Say rather the shells of pleasure-houses like these.'

Amar gave a little laugh. 'Well, look about you! From the Pleasance of the Arts, too, the glory is already departing, as you can see.'

'It will come again,' returned Gokal unexpectedly

Amar was silent for a moment, then said: 'The Prince is going away in a few days. Perhaps he will return next year — perhaps not. Who can tell?'

Gokal looked down the lake-front. 'A little flimsy. A little flimsy. — But the air and water of this place are said to preserve everything. It all sinks slowly beneath the silt, and there lies tenderly preserved.'

The Rajah was puzzled, then opened his mouth to speak, but the wind, sweeping in a fierce gust round the corner of the house, gave an excuse for silence. Together they went indoors.

The big room, now filled with dusk, looked larger and barer than ever. Apologizing for its inhospitable aspect, Amar took his guest across to the wide window overlooking the lake. 'Sit you down!' he said, and, after placing a cushion behind Gokal's back, turned and stood staring out over the empty promenade and the grey water.

'First of all,' he pronounced at last, 'I am going to give you a brief account of my experiences since leaving you. And with that he launched forth.

By the time he had finished the dusk had thickened. The expression on Gokal's face was hidden by the obscurity. Whilst Amar was talking, he had sat as still as a rock, and scarcely opened his lips. Presently Amar summoned a servant and oil lamps were placed one at each end of the room.

'Just now,' the Rajah said, 'when I was speaking about Gunevati, you let me see that what I was telling you was not new. I suppose you had already heard something about her from Jali?'

Gokal nervously smoothed out his robes. The flickering lamp illuminated the large oval of his face, but the hollows of his eyes were

dark; and yet those eyes seemed to Amar to be fixed upon him with an anxious, speculative intensity of gaze.

'Very well,' the Brahmin replied in an uncertain voice. 'We will talk about Jali, but — there will be more to say later.'

A servant came in and set some wine down on the table before them.

'Where is Vagira?' inquired Gokal absently.

'Dead — as I have already told you.'

'Ah!' Gokal sighed, made a gesture of apology, and shaded his eyes with his hand. 'You will miss him.'

Amar was silent.

'You are looking ill,' said Gokal sadly. 'It is the fever. You must be careful.'

'All that is over,' returned the Rajah shortly.

Gokal fidgeted, and then with forced utterance began to speak. 'It was only a very few hours after you left the house that Jali came. . . .'

At that moment the lamp at the Rajah's elbow was blown out by the wind, and the door at the end of the room slammed with violence. The Rajah was about to call a servant, but Gokal with a gesture stopped him. 'Do you remember?' he went on. 'It was a particularly beautiful morning. You were sailing across the lake to this place . . . As for me, I had had a bad night, and was sitting before my tent in the sun. Hari was still asleep. Sita had gone off to gather anemones on the hill behind the house. And then Jali appeared.'

Here Gokal paused, smoothed his robes, and seemed to find difficulty in going on.

The Rajah said at last: 'I cannot imagine why you find it hard to speak. Surely you don't suppose . . .'

'No, no,' replied Gokal hastily. 'My difficulty is that I shall not be able to avoid appearing fanciful and foolish. And yet I feel it to be important that you should not be too hasty in concluding that ill-health has weakened my intellect, because then nothing that I have to say will carry any weight with you.'

'My dear Gokal!' exclaimed Amar. And he added: 'Anyhow, what I think, that will I say.'

'The night before you left,' Gokal went on, 'I fell into a kind of trance, and I was still in a tranced condition when Jali came and stood before me. He stood there in the sunlight looking very wan and pitiful. We looked at one another in silence. I already knew —

partly by intuition and partly . . .’ Here he broke off, and, after giving a kind of groan, made a fresh start. ‘Amar, I know that a belief in the supernatural is repugnant to you, and yet I am obliged to state my conviction that something outside the ordinary course of nature took place in the neighbourhood of your house that morning. I was not alone in feeling it. As I have said, there was Jali standing before me; and, as I looked at him, I saw gathering in his eyes a look of astonishment and, finally, of terror. How long we continued thus I do not know, for something happened to change the whole scene. It was a morning of the hottest, brightest sunshine, as you know; every ripple on the lake, every leaf upon the trees, was sharp and clear; the face of nature was distinct with a hard definition of outline, and yet — and yet this same face of nature shivered and trembled as might its own reflection upon the surface of the lake. The thinness of the crust of tangible things, the emptiness of matter, the superficiality of appearances, suddenly were revealed. I tell you, Amar, everything wavered as if it were threatened with the loss of its flimsy surface actuality. I think this had something to do with Time, for Jali has since told me that, as I sat there before him, he saw me with my face changed and my eyes closed, as I shall be seen by him one day when I am dead. As for me, I was seized not so much with fear, as with an intense disquiet, a deep-seated uneasiness, caused, I think, by my sense of a slight but deep disturbance at the foundations of our common phenomenal world. And, while this was going on, I smelt the half-sweet, half-putrid smell of water-lilies, and then I was startled and deeply confounded by hearing the near-by trumpeting of an elephant. This sound came as a climax; and it startled me out of my trance — if trance it was. I got up to go to the assistance of Jali, who at that same moment had fallen to the ground in a faint. My servants came rushing forward with looks of bewilderment and alarm; and Hari burst, stark-naked, out of his tent. Hari has since told me that he was asleep and dreaming fearful dreams, when the trumpeting of an elephant awoke him. He started up out of his tent without knowing what he was doing, and the next minute, bewildered and vexed with himself, went back again.

‘As you know, Amar, there were no elephants within hundreds of miles of Ravi at that time. But now — this, I expect, you do not know — there is *one* — one which arrived in the Camp a week later. It had been brought here at great trouble and expense by Daniyal,

who had some idea, I believe, of introducing it into some scene in his play. But it has turned savage — from what cause I do not know — and it trumpets with rage very frequently. However, its trumpetings have never yet been audible across the breadth of the lake.

‘But to go back to Jali. He remained unconscious for some time — perhaps half an hour. Knowing that I was the person to whom he wished to unburden himself, I kept him by me. He was carried into my tent; I was with him when he came back to himself, and he remained with me, sharing my tent, for the next few days. During that time he told me all about his recent experiences at the Camp, including all that he knew about Gunevati. He told me many other things besides . . . things which in time I shall let you know. My sense of guilt in regard to him is great.’

Listening intently, the Rajah had not stirred; and, after Gokal had finished, he still remained silent. A servant now came across the room to announce that the evening meal was ready.

They went into another room, and, whilst eating, talked about the Din Ilahi. On this subject the Rajah had already written to Gokal at some length, so that the main features of the situation were known to him. But the Brahmin seemed unable to take interest in the various minor points that remained to be discussed. He was absent-minded and ate little, and the meal was soon over.

When they were back in the big room again and once more by themselves, Amar, standing by Gokal’s chair, looked down at him and said: ‘Naturally enough your strange experience at Ravi baffles my comprehension.’ He paused. ‘How many persons in all heard the trumpeting of an elephant?’

‘Ten people at least were sensible of a strange occurrence. But the actual trumpeting of an elephant was heard only by one or two besides Jali, Hari, and myself.’

‘Do you connect this thing in your mind . . . ?’ The Rajah stopped, hesitating.

‘With Gunevati — yes. Only those who know Gunevati heard the trumpeting.’

The Rajah was silent for a moment. ‘But what have we to do here with water-lilies? And anyhow,’ he added impatiently, ‘what is the connection between elephants and Gunevati?’

Gokal laid a hand on Amar’s arm and gave a long sigh. ‘You shall know all I know — but we need time.’

Amar smiled. ‘We have the whole night before us. And all to-

tomorrow, if need be. Have we not got, in fact, as much time as we choose?’

‘I doubt it,’ murmured Gokal.

Together they were looking out into the warm darkness. The wind had fallen to a dead calm. Suddenly Amar said: ‘The water-lilies, or the lotus, stand for the goddess Parvati . . . and then there is the elephant-demon Gajasura . . . Has that old myth been running in your head?’

Gokal laughed. ‘In the ancient mystery-play . . .’

‘On my way down to Kathiapur,’ said Amar, ‘I happened to witness a very poor performance of it in company with Smith.’

‘I have a good deal to say about Smith,’ murmured Gokal.

Amar was surprised, but said nothing. Seating himself by the big, low window, he looked out over the lake, which was beginning to catch a faint brightness from the rising moon. The silhouettes of one or two strollers were to be seen on the lake-front. All at once there came to his ears the faint trumpeting of an elephant; but he said nothing, for he was not sure that Gokal heard it.

‘What did Sita have to say about the Camp?’ he asked. ‘Her visit must have amused her. Did the Prince make a more favourable impression?’

‘She was amused,’ said Gokal slowly

The Rajah laughed. ‘I think that in her eyes Daniyal will always be, first and foremost, a comic figure. And that is as it should be. I don’t want her to take him too seriously.’

Gokal turned his head to gaze straight into the Rajah’s face, and in so doing he placed his own in shadow. His expression was indecipherable. He said: ‘Are you sure you are not shutting your eyes . . . ?’

‘To what?’

Gokal continued to gaze at him.

‘Let us be practical,’ said the Rajah with a change of voice. ‘I take it that you agree with me in regarding Daniyal’s accession to the throne as assured. Well! had you been at enmity with Mobarek, or unable to countenance the Din Ilahi, your position would have been awkward, because unfortunately, your enemies have a handle against you. But, as I have explained, your way seems to have smoothed itself out, and this pleases me very much, not only on your account, but because, as you know, I want you to be Sita’s chief counsellor after my retirement. The position as it is now . . .’

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At this point Gokal suddenly threw out his hand. 'You are going too fast.'

The Rajah frowned.

'What about Hari?' said Gokal.

'I was just coming to that,' the Rajah replied quietly. 'I think that the few months which Hari will have to spend in Sind will go a long way towards bringing him to a sense of reality. In his relationships with women Hari is apt to let his emotions run away with him. His sentiment for Lalita contained a great deal of unreality, as does hers for him at the present time. For Sita his feeling is no doubt of a different quality, but . . .' The sentence remained unfinished. 'I hope,' he went on after a moment's pause, 'I hope that that feeling will form the basis of a true friendship. As for Sita, the responsibilities of government after I am gone, the duties imposed on her by her position, the care of Jali — these things will necessarily distract her mind from him. That romance' — and the Rajah smiled — 'will accommodate itself to circumstances. A sentimental friendship — I don't use these words cynically — is what the future will bring forth.'

Gokal took a deep breath. 'Amar, are you still quite determined?' 'Yes.'

'You are sure that you are inwardly prepared?'

'I am not so sure as I was.' The Rajah's voice was bitter. 'But, prepared or not, I am determined to delay no longer. Is it possible that you, too, are going to try to dissuade me? Are *you* going to use the argument that my secular duties come first?'

Gokal passed his hand over his brow. 'I don't know . . . Let us begin by examining the position that you assign to me. I am afraid I am about to appear both unreasonable and ungrateful; but, alas, that cannot be helped. Amar, I find — to my own surprise and dismay — that, in spite of all the concessions Mobarek has made, I cannot associate myself with him in any way. Although Mobarek and I have much in common, although with him I believe that Life is governed by something outside what we commonly designate as Nature, and is transcendently oriented towards a supernatural goal, yet there is such a difference between his ideals and mine that I have to count him an antagonist.'

'This difference between us is sufficiently' illustrated by his attitude to Daniyal. His conscience allows him to ally himself with Daniyal in order to obtain for society the ultimate structure he

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desires. I could not do that. I believe it to be wrong to associate oneself with Daniyal even as a measure of expedience. Moreover,' added Gokal reflectively, 'I believe Mobarek's policy to be ill-judged.'

He seemed to have finished, but all at once with sudden agitation he added: 'Sita will never associate herself with Daniyal either. Make no mistake about this, Amar. It amuses her to laugh at him now, — so far she has had no occasion to do otherwise; but if you ask her to accept Daniyal, to give him even the semblance of her co-operation or goodwill, you will encounter an obstinate resistance. Neither Sita nor I can be left in the position in which you propose to leave us. Furthermore, for your own sake, I implore you not to retire yet.'

Amar rose to his feet, and, after staring at Gokal for a few moments in silence, began pacing slowly up and down the room.

'This, I admit, is disconcerting,' he said at last.

'I am sorry to have disappointed you.'

Amar continued to pace up and down.

Gokal sat with bowed head. After a while Amar stopped and looked at him. 'What you have been saying is, I think, only a part of what is in your mind.'

Gokal remained dumb, and his silence was obstinate and sombre.

'Since we began talking,' Amar went on, 'I have gradually formed the impression that certain features of the situation are greatly magnified and distorted in your imagination.' His voice was cold and hard; Gokal raised his head, and his face now showed distress. 'Perhaps,' Amar continued, 'it will relieve you to hear that I intend to tell Sita that my withdrawal will leave her free to enter into any relations with Hari that she pleases. Naturally, however, I shall say what I can in the way of advice and warning. I think that the feeling which has kept her from giving herself to Hari as yet is more complex than she knows. I shall suggest to her that loyalty to her own ideals enters into it no less strongly than her sense of loyalty to me. In her heart of hearts she is aware of the transitoriness of all human passions. I shall explain that I can contemplate with perfect equanimity — so far as I am concerned — her forming an alliance — possibly even a formal marriage might be arranged — with Hari. I shall not be jealous, and of course I shall have no right to be jealous. The love that has existed, and does still exist, between her and me will not be degraded nor diminished. In Nirvana all human

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lives and loves are lost; but the love of human beings for one another is the last of the fetters that men are called upon to cast off.'

During this speech Gokal's discomfort, after reaching a climax, seemed to have subsided into a heavy, lifeless dejection. For several minutes Amar walked slowly up and down the room. When he halted before Gokal again, it was to ask: 'Can you doubt that what I say is true?'

'Yes,' said Gokal.

Amar turned aside and went to the window. The moon had now risen high above the lake, silvering the water. Amar stood looking at it, but not seeing it.

At last he heard a faint stir behind him and felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. 'Let us go out,' said Gokal in a low voice close to his ear. 'I feel the need of air.'

Amar turned. The look of affection, perplexity, and distress upon Gokal's face softened him. Together they left the house and walked down to the edge of the water.



STANDING by the moon-lit lake, Amar was reminded of that evening in the Royal Hunting Grounds near Agra, when a sense of the wonder and tragedy of human life had so deeply penetrated him that those few moments stood forth as a landmark in his life. But, he remembered, a little later he had been unable to express his own feelings or to give utterance to the sympathy that Gokal's grief awakened in him. Some channel of communication had been blocked. 'It must not be like that again,' he now said to himself.

A few steps away stood Gokal, white-robed, massive and motionless, with his eyes fixed, not upon the lake, but upon a glow of yellow light that dyed the sky above Daniyal's theatre. He appeared to be giving ear to the faint strains of music that came from that direction.

'If we walk a little farther,' said Amar, 'we shall find a grassy bank with a willow hanging over the water; there we shall be able to fancy ourselves on our own side of the lake.' Scarcely had he finished speaking when a sound other than the music reached his ears — a sound, not loud, but too clear and unmistakable to admit of his ignoring it. He said: 'When elephants trumpet in that particular way, they should be destroyed. It is a sign of madness in them.'

'I have heard that trumpeting at intervals during the whole evening,' Gokal replied in a low voice. 'Have you not heard it too?'

'Perhaps. I am not sure.'

When they had come to the willow-tree and seated themselves, Amar said: 'Now it is your turn to talk, and I want you to speak first of all about yourself, for I see a great change in you.'

Gokal laughed gently. 'It is very simple. Whilst I was ill at Khanjo, with Sita nursing me, I moved a step farther upon my way.'

Amar, silent, continued to question with his eyes, whereupon Gokal went on: 'I freely admit that Sita has influenced me very deeply. You see, my mind had been prepared by a study of Western philosophy and Christianity. In fact those studies, by opening my eyes to the limitations and inadequacies of the oriental way of thought, were the first direct cause of my melancholia. I gained from them nothing positive. What I needed was contact with such a personality as Sita's.'

Amar knit his brows.

'It is difficult to get from books anything but information. Westerners get little or nothing from our Sacred Books. And so it was with me.'

'My friend,' said Amar pensively, 'consider how many years Sita and I have lived together, and yet . . .'

'Oh, you have apprehended, but recoiled.'

'And she?'

'Has not apprehended,' said Gokal, 'but . . .' he smiled, 'why should she?'

Amar was silent, and his face in the moonlight showed him to be puzzled. Still frowning, he looked out over the lake.

Gokal leant forward. 'Is it not extremely significant that you fell in love with a Westerner — a woman, too, of so distinctive a caste of mind? Does it not mean that there are two natures in you? Your character, as I see it, and your life, as I pass it under review, persuade me that your philosophy gives a misleading interpretation of you — an interpretation misleading to yourself. Amar, I believe you to be a man with a deep intuition of godhead, and a craving to address himself to a personal god. Your philosophy I believe to be the reaction of another part of your nature against this basic tendency. In its peculiar character the Buddhism you profess satisfies the peculiar demands of your theorizing self. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that your Buddhism is your own invention. The energies and impulses that gave it birth are personal, jealous, feminine, — so that in point of fact this cold impersonal philosophy of yours is the child and darling of an all-too-human heart. — Amar, when you refuse to the world the dignity of an arena for the very highest moral and spiritual struggle, your devaluation of life goes further than you see. It brings you very close to the position of such a man as Smith, who maintains that by tolerance, benevolence and justice — combined with a devotion on the part of the *élite*, to art — the world will be as good as anyone could require. — No! I do not mistake you here: I have not lost sight of the difference between you and Smith. Whereas for Smith the spiritual is unreal, for you it is so real, so valuable, that it must be placed outside our common human life. Nevertheless it remains true to say that in regard to life on earth your attitude approximates most dangerously to Smith's. And I beg you to take this as a sign that your philosophy is fundamentally wrong.'

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There was a pause, at the end of which Amar said dryly: 'You choose this occasion to say these things to me, because . . . ?'

'Because I see you standing at a division of the ways. Decisions of critical importance lie before you, and I believe that if you allow yourself to be guided by your philosophy instead of by your intuition, disaster will ensue.'

Amar gave a little laugh; and when he spoke it was in an altered tone. 'Let us cease from arguing in general terms, which are very apt to mislead through vagueness. I want to come down to the actual questions at issue. You hold, I think, that I should allow myself to be governed by my instinctive dislike of Daniyal even to the point of refusing to acquiesce with good grace in the success which I am convinced is assured to him.'

'Yes, that is my opinion; the present crisis compels me to give utterance to feelings that have been gathering force within me for some time. I want you to obey your instincts in regard to Daniyal. But first you must see them as they are. Then, seeing them as they are, you will change your attitude from one of frigid and contemptuous self-withdrawal accompanied by outward acquiescence into one of hot anger and non-acquiescence.'

'This is most strange!' exclaimed Amar. 'Are you so changed that you cast aside the doctrine of self-detachment that lies at the base of all.'

'Beware of error here!' interrupted Gokal. 'Do not confound self-detachment with what the Greeks called ἀσπγγσία, the incapacity for righteous warmth of feeling, and what Panjali himself condemns.'

The Rajah gave a short laugh. 'Is Daniyal then a fit object for wrath?'

'If you hate him, it is better to . . .'

'Hate him!' The Rajah checked himself. 'My dear Gokal, are you seriously suggesting that I hate Daniyal — or that it is my duty to hate him?'

His head held proudly, his eyes half closed, Amar looked out over the lake. Gokal peered at him out of the shadow of the willow-tree, and hesitated.

'You possess,' he replied at last, 'a particularly strong and fine sense of spiritual values. Now it is almost impossible to conceive of spiritual values as existing apart from personality; thus, although you yourself may not be aware of it, personalities are very significant to you.'

'I will not argue the point. It is enough if I say that Daniyal's personality seems to me quite insignificant.'

To this Gokal answered only with a sigh.

'Listen, Gokal!' the Rajah went on. 'Ever since I left my own State, more than six months ago, I have been collecting information about Daniyal, ascertaining the opinions of others, and forming a judgment. Also, having met the young man myself, I have studied him with attention. I freely admit that he inspires me with a strong personal antipathy, but that does not affect my conclusion that he is completely trivial. When that has been said, everything has been said. Do not dignify Daniyal, I beseech you, by calling him wicked. Daniyal is simply negligible — excepting of course in so far as he offers Mobarek a very useful figurehead.'

Gokal looked at Amar with curiosity. 'I have not yet said that Daniyal is wicked.'

Amar paused. 'My mind must have been going back to a conversation we had on the terrace of the Agra Palace some six months ago.'

Gokal inclined his head, then replied: 'If triviality takes an important place in the world, if it is the chief barrier between men and God, then triviality is important.'

Amar remained silent.

'No corruption is more easily spread than that of trivial-mindedness,' Gokal went on. 'It is more wicked to be heedless of good and evil than to say: Evil be thou my good! The man who defies God thereby acknowledges Him, and for him salvation waits; but the man who ignores God, the man who is incapable of an emotional response to the universe in its august or divine aspect — that man is indeed beyond the pale.'

'In some people,' said Amar, 'an incapacity to respond denotes merely . . .'

'Amar,' said Gokal quietly, 'please do not speak without sincerity. Do you deny that the "incapacity" we speak of might not just as well be called refusal? There is of course what men call moral insanity, but the term is fallacious. In organically diseased brains the very last faculty to disappear is the power of moral discrimination. Moral insanity is trivial-mindedness running riot in an intellect *otherwise* weak. In Daniyal the intellect is not weak; few of the people in this Camp are morally insane; they are trivial-minded, they offend God, and produce evil.'

'I think you go too far,' said Amar.

Gokal shook his head. 'Trivial-mindedness in individuals or communities is responsible for practically the whole of what I mean by evil. Incidentally it leads to cruelty and other wickednesses, but these are only signs that evil is present. They do not constitute the evil of which they are the symptoms.'

'This requires explanation,' said the Rajah.

'Certainly. I will begin by explaining that I define evil as an offence against the Spirit of the Universe or God. Wickedness is an offence against man, and thus also an offence against God — but only indirectly. Evil is a characteristic of certain states of affairs, certain conditions of society; wickedness is a characteristic of certain persons. Badness is the characteristic of the acts of wicked persons; and suffering, mental or physical, is often the result. But suffering must not be confused with evil.

'Let us consider wickedness first; in its simplest form it is the blind, unthinking gratification of one's own appetites without consideration for others. A higher quality of wickedness is manifested in acts of revenge, injustice, and malice, directed against particular persons who have aroused enmity. A further step in wickedness is marked by pleasure in the suffering or humiliation of others without discrimination between persons and without particular incentive. This is pure cruelty, and here evil begins to enter in — not merely indirectly, but directly. With cruelty we approach the concept of wrong done not merely by persons to persons but *through* persons by the diabolic to God. Note the quality of impersonality in cruelty. In its essence it is spiritual. Note also the quality of sexuality in cruelty; cruelty, sexuality, and religiousness are kindred manifestations of spirit. Do we not find them associated in every time and clime?

'There are three kinds of wickedness to be distinguished: offences against oneself, offences against other persons, and offences against God. The last is the highest and most subtle form of wickedness, because it is pleasure in the purest evil, sought in the directest way. What will be the nature and the characteristics of this, the wickedest type of man? He will not, as I have already explained, be merely regardless of other people, he will not be merely unjust and brutal; it is by no means certain that he will take pleasure in acts of physical cruelty; he may indeed be so constituted that such scenes will be abhorrent to him. But the mental suffering of others will always

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give him pleasure. Here, however, we must again particularize. To give him the highest pleasure this mental suffering must fall upon particular persons, not in their capacity as persons, but in their capacity rather as creatures of God, who do not merit those sufferings. What the wicked man looks for in human suffering is the spectacle of God being mocked, rightness being set at naught, the world being made to seem a place of purposeless evil, a triumph of the diabolic over the good.' Here Gokal paused; and to his intense astonishment Amar saw that he was trembling.

'Yes,' continued Gokal, 'what the wicked man desires is this: that the gentle and the innocent, the kindly and the wise — all those to whom goodness is dear — should be offered a spectacle of the world such that they sicken at heart — sicken with a horror far more awful than any that could be caused by personal affliction. The wicked man likes to think that the good man is whispering within himself: "How can such things be?" He wishes the good man's spirit to sicken — not on his own account, and not for others — not for the lot of any creature, but for the offence offered to the Creator, for the humiliation done to Goodness Itself. The wicked man knows Goodness only from the strange deep joy he receives from the idea that it is being mocked, and that those who trusted in it are being cast into despair. — Heaven forbid,' Gokal added beneath his breath, 'that you in your own experience should ever . . .'

The Rajah turned his head and fixed upon Gokal a deeply bewildered and troubled look. 'Do you mean that you fear lest I should become an instrument . . .'

'No.' He hesitated. 'But . . .'

The Rajah was silent. Studying Gokal's face by the moonlight, he noticed that it was glistening with sweat and wore a look of profound exhaustion.

After a few minutes of gloomy abstraction he got up, and helped Gokal to rise to his feet. 'Enough for to-night,' he said.

THE next day, when Amar and Gokal met, the sun was pouring in through the window of the big, dusty room. The morning had a hard brilliance, unusual to the valley, which was generally over-arched by a sky of milky haziness. With his back to the window Amar stood looking down at Gokal, who was sitting in the chair that he had occupied the evening before.

The two friends had come together in a changed mood, and this they both knew. 'He has armed himself against me,' thought Gokal sadly, 'and, I suppose, it was inevitable, for how could I expect him to abandon in a moment the way of thought, and the projects, of years?' Presently, with a sigh and a smile, he held out his hand, in which lay two gold pieces. 'Here is what I owe you,' he said.

Amar returned his smile. 'I think you owe me some kind of explanation as well. I woke up this morning feeling rather curious.'

He was referring to an incident that had occurred as they were walking back the night before. A figure had emerged out of the shadow beside the path, had approached Gokal with a cringing air, and whispered something into his ear. For a moment Amar had thought that it was a beggar, but his next impression had been that the man was delivering a message, and instinctively he had moved out of earshot. A minute later Gokal had come up to him and asked for the loan of two gold pieces. After handing this money over, the Brahmin had received something in exchange, and upon that the man had vanished again. At the time Amar had been so deeply engrossed by the train of thought previously set up by Gokal that he had given the matter little attention, but in the course of a wakeful night his mind had reverted to it several times.

'Yes,' he now repeated, 'I am decidedly curious.'

Gokal replied: 'In exchange for that money I received a packet of letters addressed to Smith.'

Amar gave a stare of surprise.

'It was a strange thing to happen,' Gokal went on, 'and all the stranger for happening at this particular juncture. — Here are the letters.' He paused and drew out a packet from under the folds of his robe. 'I want you to take them.'

'And what am I to do with them?'

'That will be for you to decide, after I have told you my story. It begins from the visit that the yogi paid to me not long ago — the visit that you have already heard something about.'

'Yes. The yogi told me that you and he had discussed religion together. I found it difficult to believe that he was speaking the truth.'

Gokal smiled. 'I assure you I found him not uninteresting. He expounded his sakti views with a good deal of subtlety.'

'That confusion of religion and sexuality is particularly distasteful to me.'

'I think,' said Gokal slowly, 'I think one should beware of placing too great a distance between the two.' For a moment he paused, then added: 'The yogi also talked about Daniyal.'

'With Churaman there!'

'I was careful, of course. So was Hari, who was also present. The yogi, on the other hand, was singularly indiscreet. He launched an attack upon Daniyal. After distinguishing between the different degrees and kinds of homosexuality, he maintained that Daniyal was to be put into the worst class. In Daniyal, he said, there was such grave aberrancy that the whole character of the man must necessarily be vitiated. The most potent of all human instincts could not deviate so widely from its proper channel without bringing about a distortion and disordering of the entire nature.'

'Did he actually say this in the presence of Churaman?'

'No. When Churaman arrived we had passed on to a discussion of Smith, — but he spoke in just the same vein against Smith. He maintained that humanism and homosexuality were kindred manifestations of an arrested or distorted spiritual life. Was it mere chance, he asked, that Plato was the chosen teacher of humanists and homosexuals alike?'

'Perhaps he was under the influence of drugs.'

'I think he is not quite sane.'

'What does he know about Smith?' asked the Rajah after a silence. 'And, apart from what I have told you, what do *you* know about him?'

Gokal smiled. 'As a matter of fact I know a good deal. Acquaviva and I were sent by the Emperor to welcome him on his first landing in India. He came in the company of a man called Jones, whom the Emperor expelled from the country very soon after his arrival. Smith's friendship with Jones throws a revealing light upon



his character. As for the yogi's connection with these two men, I can tell you nothing about it, but the other day to my surprise he produced certain letters written by Jones to Smith, and read a few passages aloud to us. It was an unwise thing to do in the presence of Churaman, because Smith and Daniyal are, as you know, friends, and these letters are such that, should they fall under the eyes of the Emperor, Smith would certainly be expelled from the country, just as Jones was.'

Picking up the packet, which was lying on the table by his side, Gokal extracted a letter, and, after casting his eyes over it, went on: 'Here is a passage that I came upon last night. "To argue with a man who believes himself to be the Vice-Regent of God on earth is obviously a useless procedure. As long as India continues to lie under the heel of an autocrat in his dotage, her case will be hopeless. What is one to expect of a man who allows his official biographer to open with a sentence like this: 'The most holy nativity of His Majesty from the sublime veil and consecrated curtain of Her Highness, cupola of chastity, and tap-root of the umbrageous trunk of happiness, occurred when the altitude of the lesser Dog-Star was 38° and when eight hours and twenty minutes had passed from the beginning of the night of 8th Adan 464.' No, I say! India's salvation lies in Daniyal. I want you to tell me about this young man, whom I have only met once. Your accounts lead me to believe that he is unusually intelligent and liberal-minded. I hope you have explained to him that the only way to fight religion in India is to disintegrate it. I mean that polytheism must be encouraged, and religion divorced from philosophy. If the Indian must be metaphysical let him bombinate strictly *in vacuo*. Religion must become increasingly an affair of festivals, ritual, and fairy stories. The little godlings in their thousands are harmless. They become, as you have pointed out, familiar and friendly. The sentiment of awe vanishes; mystery vanishes; that old vestigial sense of godhead fades away. Godlings that you dress in the morning, give breakfast to, and then put to bed in the evening — these cannot do anyone any harm. Let us nourish the pious hope that Daniyal will discard that wicked old creature Mobarek as soon as he is well established in power.'"'

The Rajah gave a laugh. 'This all goes to confirm me in my opinion of Smith. Was the yogi intending to use these letters against him?'

'I think he was. And, if so, he acted foolishly in displaying them

before Churaman. For this is what happened: twenty-four hours later he was knocked on the head and stunned, and the letters were taken from him. On hearing this, I assumed that they had passed into Daniyal's hands. But I was wrong. For, lo and behold, here they are!

'Who is the man who sold them to you last night?'

'I have no idea — nor do I know why he thought I should be interested in them.'

Amar pondered for a while. 'You are not going to suggest that I should take these letters to the Emperor? This whole business is very distasteful to me.'

Gokal smiled. 'Daniyal is also most distasteful to you, and yet . . .'

The Rajah made a gesture of impatience. 'Enough of Smith! Why should you or I trouble ourselves about him?'

'Amar,' said Gokal with seriousness, 'as a factor in the present situation Smith, I believe, is of considerable importance. There is a grave danger that Daniyal will adopt Smith's ideas. I first saw signs of this in Agra several months ago; a few words dropped the other day by Churaman gave me food for serious thought; and my thought has brought me to the conviction that Daniyal's genius for evil is going to lead him in the direction of Smith.'

'Surely you are being a little fanciful? Besides, one can hardly regard Smith and Daniyal as likely to form a very powerful combination.' And Amar laughed.

'There are epochs in history when power and influence belong not to the strong but to the cunning. My fear is that Daniyal, once established on the Throne, will discard Mobarek in favour of Smith. After all, the present alliance between Mobarek and Daniyal is artificial, for there is no real congruity between their ways of thought. An alliance between Smith and Daniyal, on the other hand, would rest upon a deep affinity. The fact that the true nature of their affinity is ignored by both is irrelevant. It matters not that Smith, in his own view, would be working for the welfare of India as the enlightened adviser of a liberal young prince. It matters not that Daniyal's view, although not quite so simple, would probably be not very dissimilar. Nor is it of importance that an adoption of Smith's ideas might well bring about — as its first immediate result — a general betterment of material conditions. No; what does matter lies beneath appearances, beneath the shallow surface of things.

And in this case the truth would be that the powers of corruption would have won a victory. As you know, it is not the machinery of civilization but the informing spirit of the social unit that keeps it alive and in health. Even the era of material prosperity inaugurated by Smith would be brief. The virtues of justice and altruism, upon which he relies, unless working under the inspiration of a transcendent ideal, are working for ill. As Lao Tse has said: "If the wrong man uses the right means, the right means work in the wrong way." Justice and altruism too often draw their energy from envy, jealousy, and disguised self-interest. Smith does not understand this. Still less does he understand that lovers of mankind in and for itself are primarily haters of God. He does not understand that it is on these grounds that he and Daniyal meet. How much does Daniyal understand? I cannot tell you. Up to now he has been youthful enough to parade a frivolous, non-moral aestheticism; but he is also clever enough to realize that as an Emperor the pure aesthete is not unlikely to end like Nero. Smith has arrived at the right moment to suggest another path.'

During this speech Amar sat very still, with folded arms, and his expression was sombre. When Gokal had finished, he raised his head; and Gokal met his dark stare unflinchingly.

'Well!' said Amar at last, 'and if you are right, what then? Can I change the course of destiny?'

Gokal leant forward, a light came into his face, but just as he was about to speak the door at the end of the room opened and a servant advanced with a letter.

'From His Royal Highness to the Maharajah! And the messenger awaits a reply.'

Amar took the letter, read it with an expressionless face, and said: 'When I clap my hands the answer will be ready. Request the messenger to wait.'

After the servant had gone, he turned to Gokal. 'Daniyal wishes me to come and see him as early as possible.'

Gokal's face had darkened; it now took on a look of extreme anxiety. 'You must find an excuse for delay.'

'But why?'

'Is it impossible to find some excuse? Let us consider.'

'But I have no objection to going.'

'You have not yet seen Sita. You have not yet had time. . . .'

'Are you afraid lest I should pledge myself — or her?'

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Gokal made a vague gesture.

'Put your mind at rest. How can I make promises for Sita — or for you?'

So speaking, the Rajah drew up to the table, took a pen, and wrote. Presently the servant entered again to receive his reply.

Gokal rose from his chair, went to the window, and stared with vacant eyes across the lake. 'What have you said?' he asked.

'That I will be with him in an hour or less.'

Gokal gave a little laugh, and it was so bitter that Amar winced inwardly.

'Tell me, Gokal!' he said, 'what, actually, do you want of me?'

Gokal faced round. 'Actually,' he said, 'Prince Daniyal is not yet upon the Throne. Well, why not fight him?'

'Do you suggest that I . . .'

'Yes!'

'I was going to say: do you suggest that I should lead my little army out to join the ranks of Salim?'

'I do suggest it.'

'My dear friend, you must be mad.'

'I believe it is the only right course for *you*.'

'For *me*!'

'Being what you are — yes.'

'I am mystified,' said Amar, whose eyes were now burning darkly.

'You are angry,' said Gokal.

Amar compressed his lips, then opened them to say, 'Right action, as I see it, always demands a recognition of what is practicable, and in this case . . .'

'No. That is where you are wrong. The world is such that no man has the right to think he knows what is practicable.'

Amar shrugged.

'Man is under an obligation to act — under a psychological necessity that is also a spiritual obligation. And somehow in his action he must reconcile the pursuit of his own small, definite, and rightful ends with the working out of an inscrutable purpose. He must not forswear his intimate knowledge that he is the chief instrument of the *supernatural* energy determining whatever in time shall come to pass.'

'The action that lies before me now,' said Amar, 'is to pay my respects to Daniyal. That done, I shall return.'

AMAR walked out into the bright sunlight, and swept a glance around him. The promenade was now covered with gaily-dressed figures. His eyes rested upon them in a dark, distant stare, whilst his thought dwelt sombrely upon his recent conversation with Gokal, and went forward no less sombrely to his coming interview with the Prince. The unusual clearness of the atmosphere made the opposite shore of the lake plainly visible; and presently, as he gazed across the glittering water, his mind was flooded with images of Sita. 'I am cut off from humanity on the one side, just as I am cut off from inhumanity on the other,' he reflected with bitterness. 'The way of life is much simplified for those who throw their emotions into the scale.'

With a lowering countenance he set off down the promenade, unconscious of the looks that were thrown at him as he passed. 'Yes,' he was saying to himself, 'come what may, I shall withdraw; and no man shall stop me. Sita, Hari, Gokal — they must order their lives according to their own lights. If, after I am gone, Sita chooses to espouse the cause of Salim, let her do so! Moreover, I shall withdraw *at once*. Gokal's words have but precipitated my action.'

So deeply engrossed was he by these thoughts that some moments passed before he became aware that a sprightly little figure was tripping along at his side, and throwing looks of smiling inquiry up into his face. He halted in astonishment. 'Prince Dantawat?' he stammered. 'You are not Prince Dantawat?'

'Certainly not, I am Shanta Shil, the Quietist.' And the speaker put his head on one side coquettishly.

The Rajah was completely puzzled. 'Then I don't think we know one another,' said he. Still absent-minded and resentful of the interruption, he stared at the stranger with a frown. Surely this *was* Prince Dantawat? And yet Dantawat had been reported dead. Was it not, indeed, Dantawat's corpse that he had come upon in the forest? Moreover, how could this plump, smiling, little man be the same Dantawat that had presented so pitiable an appearance only three weeks ago?

'Oh, but we do know one another, Rajah, — indeed we do! Only you mustn't talk about Dantawat to me: I am a new man now.'

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See, what lovely clothes! And how well I am looking, am I not? This is all the work of the dear Prince. He is taking care of me.'

The Rajah, aghast, was now walking rapidly on; but Dantawat, to his extreme discomfiture, trotted by his side. 'Rajah, do you remember, it was almost on this very spot that you saw me that morning when I threw myself into the lake. Oh, that was naughty of me, wasn't it? But rather brave, too, don't you think? Of course I always chose a place where there were plenty of people to pull me out. But all the same, when one doesn't know how to swim . . . Oh, I *was* unhappy in those days! and Daniyal had been so unkind! All my money gone, too! Not a penny left, and he wouldn't do anything to help me!'

The Rajah stopped, and examined with a long and horrified stare the man who stood before him. Dantawat's face, which had always been round and childish, now looked strangely puffy, and his cheeks were powdered and rouged. His cherubic aspect was rendered additionally comic by the fact that he had become almost bald. His body looked plump, under his tight-fitting brightly-coloured clothes. Far from resenting this stare, Dantawat looked coyly down upon the ground, his head a little on one side, and shifted his weight from one rounded hip to the other.

The Rajah removed his eyes from Dantawat to look around him for some means of escape. How was this unhappy lunatic to be shaken off? To his unexpected relief, he found himself being accosted by a lady whom he dimly remembered having met in the Palace at Agra. Yes, it was Raneé Jagashri, a woman he disliked, but was only too glad to enter into conversation with now, for he took it for granted that she would ignore his companion, who would then be obliged to withdraw. In this, however, he was completely mistaken, Raneé Jagashri seemed to find it the most natural thing in the world that he and Dantawat should be strolling on the lake-front together, and she not only included Dantawat in her conversation, but listened to his chatter with a gay and cordial interest.

'Oh, look! There go Babilo Tud and Mansur! Poor dears, they did try so hard to slip away last week, but the Prince caught them. Of course, it's very trying for him when his actors run away; but I did sympathize with them too. I'm not brave, like you, Raneé Jagashri. What *should* I do, if Salim's horsemen were to come dashing into the Pleasance! I lie awake at night thinking about it. — But of course I can't leave the dear Prince. Look at the way he has treated

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me since I was so wicked as to . . . but we won't talk about that! All I mean to say is that anyone but the Prince would have been very angry with me. Most people are still so barbarous. They don't understand how unfortunates like me should be treated. But the Prince is showing them, isn't he, Ranee Jagashri?' To this Dantawat received no reply, because the Ranee, having caught sight of other acquaintances, had strolled on.

Laying a hand gently on the Rajah's arm, Dantawat invited him to move forward again. 'I know where you're going,' said he with a sly smile. 'And you mustn't keep Daniyal waiting. Come along! I will show you the way.'

'I know the way, and I don't need you.'

'But Daniyal isn't at his house. You don't know where he is.'

'Where is he?'

'Never mind. I'll take you to him. I expect he's at his theatre. Of all the arts I love the stage the best, don't you? Of course, you know, we're all lovers of the arts here. — Oh look! did you see that? *What* a splendid man! What muscles! Oh, doesn't he make one's heart beat! Dantawat was looking back over his shoulder at an immense negro, a member of Daniyal's black bodyguard.

Grimly Amar stalked on.

Tripping and skipping at his side, Dantawat kept throwing coquettish little glances up into his face. 'Rajah, I believe I've guessed a secret of yours — shall I whisper it to you? I believe you don't really like the Prince! There! Am I not right? But, really, Rajah, fancy not admiring Daniyal. Doesn't his lovely smooth skin appeal to you? — No, not that way, Rajah. I do believe you're trying to run away from me! But it's no use; without me you'll never find Daniyal. — Now we go down this way, and there's the theatre in front of you, — only you won't be able to get in by the main entrance, because . . .'

Unheeding, the Rajah stalked on. The large doors were, as Dantawat had said, closed, so he turned in the direction of the stage-entrance, and was half-way down the alley leading to it, when a familiar voice, sounding just above his head, caused him to look up.

There was Daniyal at one of the windows, smiling down upon him with eyes in which there was a glint — or so the Rajah thought — of malice. He stopped, saluted the Prince, and received a gay greeting in return. The big, low window revealed Daniyal almost at full length, sitting upon the corner of a table, which was covered with

papers. The sun shining full upon him, his jewels all aglitter, he made a brilliant picture against the shadowy space behind.

'Smooth and voluptuous does he look,' thought the Rajah, 'but with what grossness in the curves of feature and figure alike! Yes, he is becoming more repellent every day.'

He stared up, blinking in the clear sunlight, and smiling a strained smile, while Daniyal poured out an unbroken stream of chatter.

'His mind,' thought the Rajah, 'seems careless and detached. He cultivates a light intoxication of flippancy. He looks upon himself as moving in a world of arbitrary inclinations — inhuman with the inhumanity of those who have no affections, no pity, — and perhaps no fear. And yet . . .'

Daniyal turned away for a minute to address some remarks to a person inside the room. Lowering his head, the Rajah chose this moment to throw a frowning look upon Dantawat, who was crouching like a monkey beneath the window out of sight of the Prince. 'Go away!' he said beneath his breath; and Dantawat, grinning and grimacing most strangely, got up swiftly and ran off.

'So you are just back from Kathiapur?' said the Prince, facing round again. 'I want you to tell me all about your doings there. I had a letter from Ambissa Begum this morning. She says that you and Lalita have become fast friends. I adore your sister, Rajah. What character! What pertinacity! And what a handsome woman! Do you know, as I look down on you from this angle, I can see *such* a strong family likeness. Come here and look at the Rajah, Dantawat, and tell me if you don't think . . .'

Dantawat's puffily cherubic countenance appeared in the window. He smiled and nodded; his little chirrup filled up the brief pauses in the Prince's flow of speech.

While he was talking, Amar's eyes rested upon Daniyal with a singular intentness. Daniyal's skin was shining golden, his light blue, slightly protruding eyes, which were often sleepy, had a light in them which the Rajah had never seen before. He was wearing a costume that matched their colour.

'But what am I thinking of, to keep you standing there!' the Prince now suddenly exclaimed. 'You must come in, Rajah. Dantawat, go and show the Rajah the way in.'

With these words he got up from the corner of the table, and the sound of his footsteps on the boards showed him to be walking away. For the last minute a light breeze had been playing among his papers



and the movement he had just made was sufficient to send several of them fluttering down into the street. The Rajah picked the papers up, and, when he raised his head, found it quite close to Dantawat's, for the latter was craning out over the sill.

'It's all right. He's gone,' the little man chuckled confidentially. 'He's talking to someone at the other end of the theatre.'

The Rajah held out the papers he had collected, but instead of taking them Dantawat gave a giggle, and, after glancing over his shoulder, said: 'I should read them if I were you. They might be amusing.' Then, drawing himself back into the room, he hunted rapidly through the papers on the table, selected one or two, and threw them down into the street. 'Quick!' he said. 'You'll find a letter from Ranee Sita there.'

Flushing deeply with anger, the Rajah stooped, gathered the letters up, and moved away in the direction of the stage-door. Entering, he soon lost himself in a maze of ill-lit passages, but was presently joined by Dantawat, who in an excited voice said: 'Follow me, Rajah, follow me!' Amar had no choice but to obey, and presently he came out upon a wide, dusty expanse of floor, which was evidently the stage, for close beside him there stretched the lowered curtain.

Dantawat stepped up to one of the peep-holes and looked through. 'Yes, he is still talking to the same man, — and it is something serious.'

Drawing back, he laid his hand upon the Rajah's arm, pressing him forward. 'Look!' he said urgently.

The Rajah stooped and looked. The big auditorium was divided up into strips of light and shade, as the sun's rays struck through the high upper windows, which, on the south side, had been unshuttered here and there. In one of the shafts of sunlight, some fifty feet away, stood Daniyal, an expression of extreme sulkiness upon his face. Beside him were two of his habitual followers, and both wore looks of undisguised consternation. They appeared to be cross-questioning a shabbily-dressed man, whom Amar conjectured to be a member of the Prince's Secret Service. Only one of the lower windows of the hall was unshuttered; and Amar recognized it as the one beneath which he had been standing.

As soon as he removed his eye from the peep-hole, Dantawat took his place.

'Oh, Rajah, Daniyal's got a very funny look. He has just sent the

others away and is talking quite alone to his spy. Come and look again, Rajah.'

'No. — Show me the way round into . . .'

'Hush!' Dantawat, still with his eye glued to the hole, held up a warning hand. 'Hush, hush!' he whispered. 'Daniyal's coming this way. He's walking up and down. Be quiet, or he'll hear us.'

The Rajah, frowning uncomfortably, remained silent. Then, laying a hand on Dantawat's shoulder, he wrenched him away from the curtain.

Dantawat, his eyes glittering, pointed vehemently and repeatedly at the peep-hole. 'Look!' he whispered with intense excitement. 'Look!'

Amar turned on his heel and walked away.

'Oh, Rajah, you've missed something,' protested Dantawat, trotting after him. 'And it's such a pity! Do you know what you've missed?'

A short distance in front of him the Rajah saw a door. 'Is that the way?' he asked.

'Yes, the auditorium is through there. — But wait a minute. Shall I tell you what you missed?' He giggled. 'You missed a very unusual look on Daniyal's face.'

In spite of himself the Rajah paused.

Dantawat giggled again. 'Perhaps you think that Daniyal's never frightened? But you're wrong. I tell you he's *always* frightened — but deep down, so deep that he doesn't know it.'

The Rajah still paused.

'I'll tell you something very funny,' continued Dantawat, but his tone had changed. 'Sometimes Daniyal is actually frightened of *me*! Fancy being frightened of a thing like me! But he thinks I'm slightly mad, you see. He treats me so well, he gives me such beautiful clothes, — look at this tunic! Feel this heavy gold embroidery! Isn't it lovely! — He always has me by his side, just because he likes to show me off. Everybody says: "How brave you are! How generous and forgiving! Why, anyone else would have had the wretched creature tortured to death!" And of course they're quite right. Daniyal is splendid, isn't he? He has all the best modern ideas, you know.'

As if suddenly starting out of a trance, Amar pushed open the door in front of him and stepped into the auditorium. The Prince, still talking to his spy, was standing some way off. Going across to

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the window in which the table stood, the Rajah laid the Prince's letters down upon it and waited.

Presently Daniyal came up to him. 'More trouble from dear brother Salim,' he called out gaily. 'He is sending out raiding-parties, I hear. I am going to pack up. Do you know, Rajah,' — and his voice became serious — 'I've some of my most valuable things here, — all sorts of silks, embroideries and carpets, to say nothing of jewellery. They must be packed up at once. They must be on their way down to Kathiapur before nightfall. — Babilo! Mansur! Do you hear what I say?' And he proceeded to give detailed orders.

'Ah!' — he had turned to Amar again — 'but Salim little knows what I have in store for him! That dear child Gunevati has made a full confession. Yes, in writing of course; and, my dear, a more scandalous document I never saw. When my father holds his next court for dealing summarily with the Vamacharis out will come my evidence against Salim! Can you imagine the scandal! But we must keep Gokal's name out, mustn't we?' And his eyes twinkled.

Whilst he was speaking, the stage curtains had been drawn aside, and dim figures could be seen hurrying about; in the auditorium itself a few people had appeared. There was a girl in the distance who looked like Gunevati; but the Rajah could not be sure it was she. Presently Babilo Tud and Mansur returned, and Daniyal's attention was claimed once again. 'Forgive me,' he called out over his shoulder, 'I shall not be more than two minutes,' and he moved towards the back of the stage.

The moment he had gone Dantawat bobbed up out of the shadows. 'Do you know, there's another man wanting to see Daniyal now. Such a fine fellow! He must have been in the army once, I think. — Oh, there goes that horrible elephant again! The mad ones are used for crushing Vamacharis to death, you know. I can't bear the noise they make, can you, Rajah?'

'Why does Daniyal keep this one?'

'Oh, just to frighten Gunevati with, I suppose. It's a dreadful animal. The other day . . .'

The Rajah moved away. A sudden impulse had seized him. Was that Gunevati sitting there in the corner of the hall? He wanted to know; he wanted to look at her; he wanted to see . . .

The face raised at his approach had such a delicate and melancholy beauty that his recognition was delayed. This couldn't be Gunevati — and yet it was! The girl stared up at him without interest.

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Her eyes showed that she knew him, but they also showed that she was living in the detachment of an unhappiness so deep that the exterior world was hardly present to her. The degree of her remoteness was brought home to the Rajah the next moment by the approach of Daniyal. Her big, dark eyes rested expressionlessly upon the Prince, as, gesticulating and talking gaily to Babilo Tud, he strolled over to her corner of the hall. From her dejected position she rose languidly, and, as she stood before him, no emotion of any kind was visible on her face. The Prince gave the Rajah a smile, and turned to pat her in kindly fashion on the shoulder. 'My poor dear! You mustn't mope. You really mustn't. — Tell me, Rajah, what *am* I to do with the child?'

Thrusting his arm through Amar's, he drew him gently away. 'Now I want to ask you something,' he said. 'Is it really true that you are intending to retire from the world? Rajah, I can hardly believe it! I shall not believe it until you tell me so yourself.' And, stepping back, he looked the other up and down with an expression of amusement.

Amar stiffened and grew slightly pale. 'Yes, I intend to retire.'

'Soon? How soon? — No, no, Rajah! I don't think you really mean it.'

Amar was silent.

Daniyal shook his head smilingly. 'And leave that charming wife of yours? Who will look after her? Gokal? Hari?' He paused a moment, then laid a hand on Amar's arm: 'Well, I couldn't believe it, until I had it from your own lips. But now that you have confirmed the news, let me tell you that you have my blessing. I see no reason why everything should not work out admirably.'

There was a brief pause, but a pregnant one. The Rajah's face might have been cast in metal so lifelessly still was it. At last he inclined his head. 'I thank Your Royal Highness. My intentions being what they are, I have nothing now to do but to commend to your favour those I leave behind.' And with another and a deeper bow he signified his desire to withdraw.

The Prince ignored this movement. 'If anyone is going to cause us trouble, it's Gokal, isn't it? Tell me frankly, what is Gokal's attitude?'

'I am afraid . . .'

'Exactly,' interrupted Daniyal. 'But it's too absurd, isn't it? For his own sake you simply mustn't let him be foolish. And, if your influence fails, no doubt Ranee Sita will be able to bring him round.'

— Oh, you can retire to your monastery quite happily! You know, Ranee Sita did me the honour of taking luncheon here with me the other day, and we reached a perfect understanding. I had to tell her about the threat of banishment that is hanging over Hari. Poor dear lady, she was of course rather distressed. But — oh, just look at the way they are treating those brocades!’ He pointed to a group of men who were occupied in packing up. ‘What barbarians! — Well, never mind! What was I saying? Oh yes, Ranee Sita was naturally upset. But I was able to reassure her. I said: “Now listen! If you make Hari reasonable and keep him reasonable, he shall *not* go to Sind. He shall stay with you. I give you my promise. There!” — And when she asked me what I meant by reasonable, I answered: “Merely this; Hari must give up flirting with Salim and my other enemies, and he mustn’t interfere any more between me and Ali.” — She shook her head at first, and said that Hari was rather obstinate; but of course she can make Hari do what she pleases. Women manage these things much better than we do; and, as a matter of fact, I had a letter from her only this morning — a charming letter — in which she says that Hari is going to be good. Don’t trouble about Gokal, Rajah! She will make him see reason too; of that I have little doubt. Oh yes, we shall all get on famously together. — But to think of you all by yourself in Ceylon! Rajah, are you sure that you won’t change your mind? I know that for some people religion is a necessity. I am not narrow-minded on the subject. But, really, to run away to a monastery at your age! — And to leave one’s pretty wife behind! Are you sure you want to go as far as that?’

Amar, who had listened to this without the smallest change of countenance, now took a step forward to place himself in front of the Prince, made a formal bow, and then turned in the direction of the door.

But Daniyal caught hold of him by the arm. ‘Do you see that man over there?’ He gave a little laugh. ‘Not a friend of yours, is he?’

Standing by the entrance was the Governor, and Amar noticed with a shock of surprise that his arms were bound to his sides. Furthermore, two negro soldiers were mounting guard over him. Not far off, evidently waiting to be summoned, was the shabby little spy who had been talking to Daniyal before. At a sign from the Prince he now hurried up.

‘Rajah, I want you to wait a minute,’ said Daniyal carelessly. ‘I may have something interesting to tell you.’

AMAR drew aside. For about five minutes the Prince and his interlocutor conferred together in low tones. Occasionally they both looked across the hall at the Governor; but the latter, his eyes fixed upon Gunevati, seemed to be unaware of their existence. At last Daniyal gave a little laugh, and his last words, spoken over his shoulder as he rejoined Amar, were loud enough for the Rajah to overhear: 'Very well, take him away, and lock him up for the present.'

During these minutes Amar had stood motionless, and it was difficult to tell from his expression whether he was observant of his surroundings or not. Behind him on the stage men were hurrying about busily; by the table in the window sat Dantawat, who appeared to be sorting papers. In her corner not far from the main entrance was Gunevati, and the Governor's eyes were still fixed upon her in an avid, sensual stare. The girl seemed to become aware of this after a while, for she raised her head and her glance passed fleetingly over him. There was neither pity nor curiosity in her look, only an immense weariness, an immense indifference. And yet, the next moment, she smiled; she was bending forward and putting out her hand, and a smile of ravishing beauty passed over her face. A large, white Persian cat ran and leapt on to her lap. She sank back at once into her former posture, the smile faded, and while her hand stroked the cat her thoughts evidently were far away.

For a moment the Prince stood looking at Amar with a smile. 'Yes, I am afraid there is no doubt about it. The Governor is a traitor . . . in the pay of my brother Salim.' His manner was as carelessly good-humoured as usual, and yet something in him had changed. 'A Vamachari, too, I expect! Altogether a disgusting creature! And yet Mabun Das has often spoken very well of the man. Isn't that rather odd, Rajah? Tell me, what do *you* make of it?'

'Your Royal Highness, I am very little acquainted with either the Governor or Mabun Das.'

'You saw something of Mabun at Kathiapur,' returned Daniyal,

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smiling, 'and I appeal to you as a judge of character. Come, what do you think of the man?'

Amar was silent.

'Well! Tell me this at least,' Daniyal went on, 'how is it that Mabun and Hari became such friends at Agra? What brought them together, do you think? Come, Rajah, you have a knack of getting at people's secrets. You are so sympathetic. Ambissa Begum tells me that Lalita made you her father-confessor. She must have told you all about her flirtation with Hari. Dear me, what a romantic affair that was! It is wonderful, the way Hari steps out of one romance into another!'

As he spoke, Daniyal was pacing slowly up and down the hall, and on one of the scattered seats there lay some coloured cork balls such as jugglers use; three of these he now picked up, and, whilst continuing to talk, kept them dancing in the air. 'Do you know, Rajah, I have often wondered why Mabun never reported to me that my darling betrothed was carrying on — I think "carrying on" is just the right expression here! — with another man? It isn't as if Mabun had been great friends with Hari in those days. And yet not a word did he ever say to me! — That Mabun *did* know all about it I have from Gunevati, and she knows because she informed him herself. Besides, her story of how she came to inform Mabun is *most* curious. I am inclined to think that she hasn't yet told me the whole truth. Perhaps she is afraid of giving Mabun away? Perhaps . . . Anyhow, her story is a very odd one. It appears that one evening when Hari and Lalita were having a secret meeting in the Royal Hunting Grounds at Agra, Lalita's horse knocked a man down — and that man, as it happens, was none other than my dear brother Salim! You see, Salim and Gunevati and some other Vamacharis were on their way to a deserted pavilion where they were going to have a little orgy together. Well! in the confusion of the accident poor dear Lalita dropped her riding-whip, and Gunevati picked it up, and then, somehow or other, the whip was traced into her possession by Mabun. It's a long, complicated story; and, as you see, parts of it are still missing. But the long and short of it is that Mabun has not been open with me. In fact, I find it difficult to believe that he has not been actually conniving with Salim.'

Scarcely had these words left Daniyal's lips when shouts and screams were to be heard in the distance, and this was followed by a thudding of hoofs upon the planking of the promenade.

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Daniyal and Amar each stiffened into immobility. Over the whole theatre there fell a deep hush. Gradually the clamour died down, the hoof-beats faded into the distance again, and everywhere a deep silence reigned.

Abruptly Daniyal turned away, gave his shoulders a twitch, and swept a glance around him. 'Dear me!' he cried, and again 'Dear me!' His intonation was exaggeratedly nonchalant. 'That sounded like a bit of life in the raw, didn't it? I was half expecting brother Salim to put in an appearance here.'

The sound of his voice was the signal for a general hubbub. There was a rush to the door on the part of some, while others craned their heads out of windows. Daniyal and Amar remained in the centre of the hall; their looks met, then each turned away.

'Well?' the Prince called out. 'Has no one anything to report?'

An answer came almost at once from Dantawat, who was at the window. 'Yes! Oh yes!' he cried in a high excited pipe. 'Your Royal Highness, there is somebody running! Oh, I declare it's Mansur! Poor Mansur, how frightened he looks! Now he's coming in by the stage-door.' And Dantawat hurried up to the Prince's side. 'Your Royal Highness, he will be here in a moment. Isn't it terrible! Did you hear those screams! — Rajah, why do you look like that? Your expression is really quite wicked. Aren't you sorry for . . .'

The sound of footsteps was now heard at the back of the stage, and Daniyal swung round on his heel. Exceedingly red in the face, and wearing an expression of the sourest disgust, Mansur came trotting forward upon his short legs. Having reached the Prince, he closed his eyes and pressed both hands upon his heart.

'Well?' said Daniyal with some impatience.

'Your Royal Highness . . . my heart!' and Mansur opened his mouth to pant like a dog.

'Nonsense!' said Daniyal.

'I was walking with Babilo along the lake-front, when suddenly a lot of horsemen appeared and began riding us down as if we were so many — so many — I don't know what. For about a mile along the promenade they went, trampling down men and women alike, and doing it on purpose, too! I never heard of such a thing! — Your Royal Highness should have closed the Pleasance weeks ago. Your Royal Highness isn't safe here. I should think fifty people must have been killed. Please, have I permission to go and pack up my things?'



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Daniyal laughed, but in a tone of vexation. Turning his back on those who stood beside him, he moved a few steps away.

'Rajah!' he called without turning his head.

'The defence of the Pleasance is in the hands of Mabun Das. That man is a traitor, and I have always suspected it.' For a few moments he stood looking straight before him. Amar stared into his face with a kind of greedy fixity; his lips were compressed in such a manner that he seemed to be wearing a smile. When the Prince began walking in the direction of Gunevati he remained by his side.

Rocking himself on heels and toes before her, Daniyal looked the girl up and down with half-closed eyes. Strangely enough Gunevati had not risen at the Prince's approach, and even now she remained seated. The reason, however, was apparent; she had watched the Prince coming towards her in a daze of fear; and now there was blank terror in her eyes.

'My dear,' said Daniyal carelessly, 'I am afraid your confession was incomplete, after all.'

Gunevati was silent.

Daniyal gave a little shrug, and then looked sharply towards the main entrance. A fine-looking young man, in the uniform of a lancer, was approaching. Coming to a halt, he gave the Prince a military salute, and waited for permission to speak.

'Well?' said Daniyal.

'Your Royal Highness, I have the following report to deliver. Six horsemen rode into the camp half an hour ago. After being driven off from the military gaol, from which they were evidently hoping to release the Governor of this district, they made off for the woods to the south-west. One of their number was killed outside the gaol. Our casualties are one man killed and one wounded.'

'Where is your superior officer?' asked Daniyal after a pause.

'He is coming. He sent me ahead to report, so that Your Royal Highness should not be left too long without knowledge of the affair.'

'I shall talk to him outside,' said Daniyal, and he moved rapidly towards the door, but on his way he stopped and turned. 'Stay here, all of you,' he ordered, and his eyes travelled across Amar's face.

For several moments after he had gone there was silence, then the lancer stepped up to the Rajah and said in a low voice, 'Something of this kind was bound to happen sooner or later. Why on earth doesn't the Prince leave this damned place? To defend it against

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raids such as this is a sheer impossibility, — unless one puts up a stockade; and that the Prince won't allow.'

'He says that Mabun Das is betraying him.'

The young officer flushed with anger. 'His Royal Highness has no right to speak like that. We are all loyal men — God help us!'

These last words, spoken in the manner of an aside, brought a faint smile to Amar's face.

The lancer folded his arms, and, after throwing a swift contemptuous glance round the theatre, dropped his chin upon his chest in moody abstraction. Silent and motionless the Rajah also stood. For several minutes the silence of the building was such that the contented purring of the cat on Gunevati's knees was distinctly audible. The girl's fingers were scratching its head, but the look on her face showed her mind to be far away.

To Mansur and Dantawat this silence soon became oppressive. Mansur, who had been mopping his brow with a silk handkerchief, now blew his nose loudly several times in succession, while Dantawat began shuffling about with his feet. 'I wish you'd put that handkerchief away,' he said at last. 'I wish you'd talk to me. Did you notice Daniyal's expression? Oh, it was very odd! It was indeed! I don't think I have ever seen him look quite like that before. Someone, I'm sure, is going to catch it!'

As Mansur completely ignored this, Dantawat glanced round appealingly at the others; but nobody showed a sign of having heard him.

Plucking at Mansur's sleeve, he went on: 'I *am* glad I'm not in somebody's shoes, aren't you? Somebody's going to get into trouble, I'll swear. Who do you think it will be?'

Mansur turned away, and, without addressing himself to anyone in particular, observed in acrid tones: 'Our casualties are reported as one killed and one wounded! Why, out there on the lake-front I should say there are half a dozen killed and certainly a score of wounded. These military people are all the same! To them civilians are no more than flies — their death doesn't count.'

Dantawat giggled. 'They might have killed you. But I don't think *that's* what's worrying Daniyal.'

'Not a day longer shall I stay here,' grumbled Mansur. 'Not a day!'

'It's the treachery of Mabun Das,' Dantawat went on brightly, '*that's* what he minds. Fancy Mabun being a traitor! But so

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many people are treacherous, aren't they? I mean just a little bit treacherous,' and he tittered self-consciously.

'Mansur, come here!' he went on after a minute. 'I want to whisper a secret.'

Dragging at Mansur's arm until they were a few steps away, he whispered: 'Have you looked at the Rajah's face? No? Well, look now! Look!'

Mansur looked and shrugged.

'Oh, you should have seen him and the Prince a little while ago! He doesn't like Daniyal, you know. He never did. They were walking up and down and talking together, and as they talked . . .' He broke off, for Daniyal's voice had become audible through the curtains that hung over the doorway.

For the next two or three minutes no one in the hall spoke, all were listening to the sound of a conversation between Daniyal and some people in the vestibule. Daniyal appeared to have all his usual calm, and to be furthermore in a witty vein, for his remarks were greeted by the laughter of his hearers. When the moment came for taking leave of his audience he could be heard doing so with all his customary flourish.

Suddenly the curtains were drawn apart by two negroes, and he made his appearance. He was accompanied by his secret agent, to whom he was speaking with a gay volubility. Instead of coming forward he remained by the entrance, taking a few steps now to the right and now to the left, and presently, whilst talking, he held out his hand to one of the negroes, who put into it the three coloured balls which he again began to juggle with.

At last with a nod he dismissed his interlocutor, and, still keeping his balls dancing in the air, advanced slowly towards the waiting group. All remained where they were; but the white cat, which had got up from Gunevati's lap, was yawning and stretching itself. It now came running across the floor, and, on reaching Daniyal, rubbed itself against his legs, causing him to miss one of the coloured balls. Then it threw itself down on the ground in front of him, lying on its back, and with a mew invited him to play with it. But Daniyal had frowned when the ball dropped, and now, lifting the sole of his right foot, he placed it on the cat's head. Then with a swift and smiling glance at his spectators he slowly pressed his foot down. One after another the bones in the cat's head could be heard to crack, and, when this sound came, the Prince's eyes glanced for

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one smiling second into those of Gunevati. The cat's paws were beating the air; its body rose stiffly in an arc and then collapsed in spasms; a little pool of blood spread out upon the floor.

Very slowly Gunevati slipped off her seat and lay upon the ground prostrate.

'Oh, what a shame!' exclaimed Dantawat with a nervous giggle.

'Poor pussy! Such a lovely pussy!'

Daniyal's bright, blue gaze flickered once more over the faces of his audience, and the smile about his lips remained the same. The young lancer, coming suddenly out of his immobility, went forward, picked Gunevati up from the floor, and moved towards the doorway. At the same time Daniyal beckoned to his two negroes, one of whom took the cat up by the tail and carried its twitching body away; to the other he said something in an undertone, and this man remained by him.

During this scene the Rajah had stood completely motionless, except for a swelling of the muscles of his jaw, and a twitching of the fingers of his right hand. The veins on his forehead had also swollen; but these signs of emotion very soon disappeared. His eyes remained fixed upon Daniyal, darkly but expressionlessly, as the latter now came sauntering towards him.

'My dear Rajah,' said the Prince, 'you have been very patient. I know it's dreadful, the way I keep people waiting. It's one of my failings. But really, on this occasion . . .'

Slipping an arm through Amar's, he made as though to start off once again on a march up and down the floor. But Amar's body remained rigidly unyielding; so there, close up against one another, the two men stood, Daniyal smiling into the Rajah's face, towards which his own, uptilted, came gradually nearer and nearer.

'My dear friend,' he murmured, 'surely you are not . . .'

Suddenly, with a movement of great swiftness, Amar's hand went to the hilt of his short sword, and the blade was half out of its scabbard before the negro, who had stationed himself behind him, and was watching his every movement with ready alertness, brought down a metal elephant-goad on to the top of his head. The Rajah crumpled to the ground.

Stepping back, Daniyal surveyed the body on the floor with pursed lips and raised eyebrows. To Dantawat and Mansur, who had come running up, he said: 'Another minute, and I really believe he would

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have run me through. A very hot-tempered gentleman! — I hope you haven't killed him?' he added, turning sharply to the negro.

'Not unless his skull is very soft,' replied the man with a grin.

'Have I Your Royal Highness's permission to retire?' asked Mansur in a querulous tone. 'I am feeling very unwell after what happened on the lake-front this morning.'

Daniyal laughed.

'I take it for granted,' continued Mansur sulkily, 'that I am now allowed to pack up and leave the Pleasance? With Your Royal Highness's permission, I shall draw my salary and leave this afternoon.'

Daniyal pirouetted on his toes, rubbed his hands together, and laughed again for quite a long time. 'What nonsense! But you can run away now. — Only remember!' And he held up a warning finger. 'There is a rehearsal this afternoon at five o'clock.'

'A rehearsal?' cried Mansur in dismay. 'But surely we're all packing up?'

'Yes, at our leisure. I find there's no hurry. Things are not as bad as I thought, and I am going to stay here another week at least. I shall do it, if only to annoy that wretched brother of mine.' With a light step he moved towards the stage. 'Come along, Dantawat, we must see what these men are doing. The way they are handling my things is really too barbarous!'

In another minute he would have disappeared, but the negro was hurrying after him. 'What shall I do with the gentleman?' he asked with the same broad grin.

'Oh, let him be sent back to the house of Shaik Mobarek. He has a friend there.'

IN the evening of that day Gokal sailed back across the lake, with Amar stretched on a mattress at his feet. The boat moved very slowly, for the air was hardly stirring; the bows made no sound as they cleft the glassy water.

Every now and then Gokal would bend down to look into Amar's face, and at regular intervals he placed upon his head a fresh towel, wet and cold from the water of the lake. Amar's eyes were closed, but his face did not wear the look of relaxation that usually comes with sleep. His brows were slightly knit; he looked haughty and aloof.

Very slowly did the Pleasance of the Arts recede into the haze that was beginning to fill the valley. The sun, which had just set behind a spur of the hills, was making the air golden and spreading an iridescent film over the water. Not until the boat was nearly half-way across did Gokal cease to cast nervous looks behind him, for he was pursued by an unreasoning fear lest Daniyal should change his mind, and send out a boat to demand that Amar be brought back.

What exactly had happened was as yet unknown to him, but the men who had carried Amar unconscious to his door had said enough to show that *this* was what he had been obscurely foreboding, the fulfilment of a destiny that had perhaps been inescapable. As a culmination and a fulfilment this calamity even brought with it a certain peace — just as the crisis of an illness is welcomed as ending a period of suspense.

A surge of pity and tenderness swept over his heart, as he bent down to gaze into Amar's stern, unseeing face. 'Either he will die, or he will enter into a state of health and strength better than any before.' With this thought he tried to comfort himself, as he wrung out another fresh towel in the water of the lake. Nevertheless, beyond the melancholy peace of the present hour, he saw no certitude anywhere. The dramas of real life, he thought, are not like those of the stage, for the imagination of the gods is never-ending, and of finality there is none.

Raising his eyes, he peered at the line of shore where the Rajah's house stood. It seemed to be getting hardly any nearer; for, as the

distance diminished, the dusk deepened, and the outlines of things grew more dim. But the boat's slow progress no longer troubled him; out in the solitude of the lake he was free of his former fears. With the bats flying low over the water, and the colours of earth and sky all gently fading into a misty dusk, the tranquillity of earth penetrated him, and none of the impatient, reproachful questions that men ask of Fate seemed to him to need an answer. He noticed, not for the first time, that there is a moment when, by its very closing in, the evening expands itself, and the great dome of the sky hangs with a new spaciousness over the darkening earth. The silence, too, of the evening seems to possess this same spaciousness, so that even when sounds break it, they are of no account. 'They are engulfed,' he thought, 'they are lost — like that flight of ducks, moving very high up, which in another moment will be gone.'

Now the grey patch of the Rajah's roof was no longer visible, although the boat was close under the shore; nor were there any lights showing in the windows to mark the place where the house stood. Gokal looked down at the man who lay stretched like a corpse at his feet, and, thinking what a herald of sadness he was, his heart sank within him. All unconscious of what awaited them — for Amar had asked that neither Sita nor Hari should be informed of his arrival at the Camp — those two lovers were even now in the full enjoyment of their happiness. Somewhere no doubt among those dark trees they were sitting together and talking, or perhaps they were loitering on the grassy path by the lake; it might be that they had noticed his boat approaching and would be on the landing-stage to greet him.

'Nearly four weeks!' he said to himself. 'They have had nearly four weeks.' And he tried to take comfort in the thought that the beauty of a personal relation, no matter how brief in time, in eternity, is everlasting. There are moments, he thought, when feeling rises to an intensity which causes it to leave an imprint upon something more enduring than individual memories. Lovers are dimly aware of this even in the engrossment of their personal happiness. They should remember it afterwards. . . .

Reflecting upon his own experiences of love — how enticed, and thwarted, and tricked, and self-betrayed he had been — he saw that even in his pitiable errancy there had been some profit, for it was to these experiences that he owed at least some part of his present understanding of what love might be, — some part too of his intuition concerning the loves of Sita and Hari. He needed the assurance

that they did indeed love one another well to lift him above a sense of disloyalty to Amar. During these days he had been able to derive a kind of exultation from their love, but in his heart there had also been much sadness and not a little fear.

Strange, quiet days! when, living in the constant companionship of Jali, he had sat talking outside his tent, or wandered meditatively along the lake-shore, or gone out fishing on the lake. One after another, radiant mornings had blossomed into warm windless noons, the mellowness of which had lasted until the fall of night. And all these days he was listening with his inner ear to the soundless music that the lovers seemed to spread around them.

With a slight jar the boat came up against the wood of the landing-stage. Gokal felt a sudden shock at his heart, and he stood up. The two boatmen got out of the boat and squatted on the bank waiting.

Gokal stood quiet for some time, looking round him into the obscurity. He could see a little way over the lake and a little way along the lake-path, but wherever there were trees the darkness was complete. He sat down again and looked at Amar, whose corpse-like immobility now made him feel helpless and afraid. What was he to do? what was he to say to Sita and Hari? The blow that he was about to deal them made him feel guilty and sick. This was such a sudden and violent end to their brief period of happiness. An end, yes! — but it was also a beginning.

Looking down at Amar, he envied him his unconsciousness. The thought came into his mind that if Amar were to die without recovering consciousness, it would be a good thing. But he condemned that thought.

There was no lapping of the water against the sides of the boat, — only absolute quiet! There were no lights in the house. No lights or sounds anywhere. In a moment of confusion and panic he asked himself whether the place were not deserted . . . whether Hari and Sita had not run away?

He got up and stepped clumsily out of the boat. 'I am going up to the house,' he said to the two boatmen. 'Watch over the Maharajah while I am gone.'

As he went up the path under the trees, he heard Hari, Sita and Jali talking and laughing together in the veranda.



# THE POOL OF VISHNU

## PART ONE

THERE were three pools sunk in the white marble of the terrace; the water in them was black, and the westering sun put a glitter upon their darkness. The terrace itself rose out of the desert in serene and lonely beauty, its whiteness flushed to the pink of a sea-shell. Above, the windless sky was flecked with vultures; they wheeled and slanted, and at times they dropped. Beneath them moved a slow, dark trickle of humanity — a trickle pushing its way from horizon to horizon through the clogging, desert dust.

Sita was sitting on the terrace. Before her were the glittering pools; and beyond them, in the centre of the marble platform, a castle towered into the sky. It was a castle of fantasy. Strangely and inappropriately built of wood, cracked and bleached by the sun, it towered in silvery and premature dilapidation over the surrounding waste. Travellers pointing from the far distance would say: 'There is the castle of the mad Sesodia, who alone survived the siege of Chitor.'

Sita looked up at the vultures, her gaze dreamy and yet intent. But at the sound of someone stepping out from the castle door she lowered her head quickly, and when she saw that it was Hari, life came into her face. Hari was dressed for riding; his military riding-boots clattered on the flags; she noticed that his carriage of himself was erect — too erect. That meant he was tired.

'I've been down to the stables with Jali,' he called out. 'Some new men from the cavalry-post have just arrived — a fine lot with good horses.'

'Have they any news?'

'No.' He hesitated for an instant, then added: 'Their well, I fancy, is getting rather low — like ours.'

Sita knit her brows and turned her head away. Staring at the parapet with unhappy eyes, she said: 'Those people still go drifting past — right under our wall. I looked just now. Some seemed to be dying.'

Hari's face grew dark. 'We have no water to spare. And you know it.'

'We ought to share.'

'Perhaps. But I am not going to let you die of thirst.' And, as

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she remained silent, he went on: 'Besides, what happened last time would happen again. If we draw attention to ourselves a crowd will break in. Then they'll drink that water,' he pointed to the pools, 'and you know what that means — a very unpleasant death'

Sita's head remained bent. 'All the same,' she murmured, 'we ought somehow . . . to share.'

'I daresay. But why only water? And why only now? Somewhere or other in India there is drought and famine every year, but we don't see it, and so we don't care.' Abruptly and without waiting for a reply, he walked over to the terrace wall. While he stood there looking down her eyes rested upon him sadly. 'He is tired,' she was thinking, 'and no wonder! All the responsibility falls on him. A disabled man, a woman, and a boy are on his hands. This journey has been horrible, horrible.' Leaning back she closed her eyes. The heat had taken away all her strength. Would there never be a breath of wind? Not even at sunset?

Hari returned. 'Nothing new,' he said shortly

She answered without raising her lids. 'They go past so silently. There is something dreadful in their quietness.'

He sat down beside her.

'I sometimes feel,' she went on, 'as if all that had happened in the last few weeks . . .'

'Yes?'

'As if it were retribution.'

'I knew you were thinking that.'

She opened her eyes and gazed at him. 'Can you believe that it is only a few weeks since we left the Hills? Do you remember that evening when we were sitting on the veranda looking down over the lake?'

He made no answer, and after a minute, turning away from his expressionless, set face, she added beneath her breath: 'We do still love one another, don't we?'

'Yes.' The word was brought out with vigour; then, his intonation sardonic, he added: 'Alas, we do!'

She studied his face again, but vainly. 'Hari, what is it? I feel there is something you haven't told me.'

He gave a brief laugh. 'You know me too well. Actually, there is nothing to tell you, but I had hoped there would be. I went in to see Amar just now. He might, I thought, be willing to speak at last; but I was wrong.'

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'You went into his room?' Sita's voice was anxious, she moved uneasily. 'Why didn't you warn me that you were going to do that? What did you say?'

'Very little. I talked about this accursed journey — about our chances of being able to push on soon. And every now and then I waited.'

'But he said nothing?'

'Just yes and no. Nothing more.'

On this there was a silence. At last she drew a deep breath. 'I must go in now and say good-night to him.'

She got up, and he too. For a moment they stood still, looking straight before them. The façade of the castle glowed with theatrical splendour, the pools glittered redly, the vultures wheeled in the sky. Hari picked up her hand and kissed it.

'What we have had we have had,' he said.

A shadow passed over her face. 'I don't know quite what you mean.'

Again he gave a little laugh. 'I mean nothing that you could mind.'

Together they moved towards the castle door.

On the threshold Hari stopped; they exchanged looks, and Sita went in alone. She passed through a lofty, octagonal hall into a small room at the end of which an old man-servant was squatting beside a curtain. He rose as she approached and drew the curtain aside. Going into the room beyond, she stood still for a moment near the doorway, looking across the bare space of floor at Amar's bed. Amar was lying on his back, a wet linen pad on his forehead, his eyes closed. She peered, for the light was dim; she could see nothing clearly, and was uncertain whether he had heard her come in.

A sudden recollection of another sunset hour rose into her mind. She remembered how she had paused upon the threshold of Jali's bedroom in the Old Palace at Agra, while Amar, who was standing in a flood of evening light, stared at her with eyes that seemed to be the eyes of a seer. The contrast between that moment and this brought sadness and terror into her heart. O cruelty of life! O cruelty of time and change! She swayed a little, and the words, 'Lord, have mercy!' came in an unconscious whisper from her lips.

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Now she moved towards the bed, and still Amar gave no sign. His hands were clasped behind his head, his eyes remained shut, and yet she felt sure that he was not asleep. His face seemed to her to be a mask behind which an active brain was working. She sat quietly down by the bed, not looking at him, and she thought: 'How remote he is! But he was remote even before his injury. He has been moving away from me for years — ever since Jali's birth. Our religions have carried us in opposite directions. Was this inevitable?' And her sad thoughts ran on: 'To me this world, the garment of God, becomes more charged with beauty, with significance, every year; to him it has been just the opposite. Every year less significant, less real. And now, what he is thinking — in what solitude his spirit is communing with itself — I don't know — I shall never know.'

Long and closely she looked into Amar's face, and as she did so fear crept over her, a new and ugly fear. Something within her said: 'Although his eyes seem closed, he is watching. How can you tell what he is feeling, or what passions he has been nursing in his heart all these days? At this very moment he is hating you. He is your enemy. Beware! Beware!'

With shame she stifled this voice, and sent all her love out to Amar in a desperate, though silent, appeal. Silently she besought him to believe that her love for him was not dead. She pleaded for a little of the same compassion that she was giving him.

But Amar gave no sign, and at last she pronounced his name.

'Yes, my dear,' he replied, his voice very gentle and low.

'You were not asleep?'

'No. Not asleep.'

'But not in pain, I hope.'

'No. I have very little pain now.'

She paused. 'Amar, is there nothing I can do?'

'Thank you, my dear, nothing.'

'You know . . .' Her voice shook a little in spite of herself. 'You know, how I . . .' She had begun the sentence without thinking how she would finish it.

And Amar replied gently but briefly: 'Yes, I know.'

She mastered herself; then rose, took up his hand, and inclined her forehead to it. 'I am going to write to Eudoxia. Is there anything you want me to say?'

'Tell her I am doing well.'

'But — are you?'

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‘Yes.’

She moved away. In a cloud of stupefying sadness she withdrew and went slowly up the creaking, dusty stairs to her own room. In a dream she stood by the window watching the red sky fade. When at last she came back to the present, it was with a start. She lit a lamp, sat at her table, and prepared to write.

The thought of Eudoxia, her old nurse, brought her comfort. She had a longing for communication with someone who had known her when her life was simple — uncomplicated by any of her present emotions. Eudoxia had been with her on that journey fifteen years ago, when she had left her home in the Caucasus as Amar’s bride. Eudoxia had looked after her at the time of Jali’s birth and lived with her ever since. Another woman might have watched the course of her young mistress’s life too closely; another might have speculated and judged; but Eudoxia’s devotion had allowed of neither curiosity nor criticism. And it was to her that she now turned, finding that her troubles lost some of their painfulness when she fitted them to the comprehension of that loyal, loving mind

She wrote: ‘I hope you have not been feeling too anxious. It would have been useless to write before because no messenger could have got through to you — and now I hardly know where to begin. It is over a month since Hari Khan and Jali and I were sitting in the twilight on the terrace at Ravi when suddenly Pundit Gokal came hurrying up from the lake and told us that the Rajah had had an accident and was lying unconscious in a boat below. We went down and brought him up to the house; he had received a blow on the head, and although the doctors at the Pleasance had said that the injury was not grave, we were all very alarmed. Perfect rest would have been the best thing for him, but, unfortunately, the very next day news came that Salim’s horsemen were making a dash forward and that the district was unsafe. Our journey was difficult from the start. On the way down to Kathiapur there were torrents of rain; and we had to go very slowly, for the Rajah was carried in a litter. After only a few days’ rest we pushed on to Etapur, and there we met sudden and terrific heat. The city was half empty, for drought and famine were driving the people away, and cholera had broken out in many parts of the State. Yet we were obliged to stay in Etapur for a week, for some of our servants had run away, and it was impossible to continue the journey without an armed

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escort. The roads round Etapur are infested by brigands, and farther south the country is overrun by bands of Salim's horsemen. It was difficult to decide what to do. The Rajah remained — as he still remains to-day — stretched in silence upon his bed — not, I think, actually in a stupor, but infinitely remote; and no one can reach him. At last we pushed on again — and this stage of the journey was terrible. We were constantly meeting long trains of men, women, children, who were struggling painfully across the desert, in an attempt to escape from pestilence and famine. At dawn on the third day a half-hearted attack on us was made by some starving villagers. After we had driven them off, we offered them some of our provisions, and in return they gave us warning that a band of three hundred of Salim's horsemen had just heard of our whereabouts and were planning to cut us off. This was my chief dread. For Jali, in that event, would certainly be taken away as a hostage. Rajah Chandra and Rajah Birpal have both lost their sons in that way. So we turned aside from our road, and presently had the luck to fall in with a troop of the Emperor's lancers; and it was then that Hari Khan remembered that a few miles from their cavalry camp there was the empty, half-ruined castle of the Sesodia, and suggested that we should use it as a temporary refuge. So here we are — protected by the camp from brigands as well as from Salim's bands. And soon, I hope, we may be able to push on towards home.'

At this point Sita paused, then got up and went to the window again. The star-lit desert had an immensity that made her heart sink. Would they really ever reach home? And if they did, what then?

Again the word retribution came up into her mind. But she rejected it. Pressing her head against the window-frame, she shut her eyes. 'No,' she cried to herself, 'I cannot feel that my love for Hari is wicked — even though, as a Christian, I know that such loves are wrong.'

For a long time she stood there, reliving in memory the happy hours at Ravi — the days in which she had yielded to a full and untroubled enjoyment of her love. She pictured the hillside behind the house, with Hari lying beside her upon the mountain turf, and far away down at their feet the shimmer of the lake. She felt again the languor of the afternoon, heard the hum of the bees, and remembered the peace that had possessed her. She had said to

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herself: 'How wonderful to be able to love, and to gaze deep into one's love, and not to look beyond.' During that time she had been raised above all care — yes, even in those moments when she had paused to ask herself what the end was to be. 'Is it not madness to stake one's all upon one thing like this? No, one must never dread future pain. One can't possess real joy, if one is afraid of pain to come.'

And now, although the thought remained with her that she was giving her heart as a hostage to Fate, she was unable to feel that God was against her; and although she looked at herself in wonder, the sense of wrong-doing was not in her. She remembered that she had said to Hari: 'Are you, too, not surprised at what I have done? Have you forgotten that I am a Christian, and that this way of life is for me a sin?'

And frequently, thinking of *his* life and purpose, she had said: 'If you had Christianity, your powers would have a base from which to work, and a goal towards which to strive.' But a consciousness of the falsity of her position would as often cause her to smile ruefully and add: 'Yes, but what place should I then have in your world? What would become of me? You couldn't include me if you had my faith. How could we be Christians together? I am not practising Christianity in my own life simply because I love you. But in spite of this I still believe — yes, more than ever before, I believe.'

HARI had followed Sita with his eyes as she disappeared into the dusk of the hall. Then, after a moment, he turned, walked to the corner of the terrace, and stood there staring out across the sand.

Not many minutes later Gokal appeared in the doorway. The sun's last rays shone redly upon his tall, massive, white-robed form, and he blinked against the light. His eyes fastened upon Hari; he gazed at him long and intently. In Gokal's eyes there was always a speculative melancholy, and now he seemed to be beholding Hari's solitary figure outlined not merely against desert and sky but against all the depths of time and space beyond.

At last, moving silently forward on bare feet, he came up to within a few yards of Hari and then stopped. His approach had not been heard, and softly, undecidedly, he pronounced Hari's name.

Hari swung round with a start.

Mounting the step, Gokal stood beside him, and for a few moments both stared before them in silence; then Hari said: 'I went in to see Amar — about an hour ago.'

Gokal knit his brows. 'Ought you to have done that?'

'Why not?'

Gokal made no answer.

Hari's shoulders gave a jerk. 'He has no right to treat Sita in this fashion.'

'I think he has a right to choose his own time.'

'No. His behaviour is cruel.'

Gokal sighed, then murmured, 'What did you say to him?'

'I talked about our situation here. Then waited for him to speak.'

'He knew quite well why I had come.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said nothing.'

After a pause Gokal turned his head. 'There was a time when you two could understand one another. But now . . .'

'No one can understand Amar now.'

'You mean — because his mind is affected?'

'No. That would be an explanation. It is just because he is as sane as you or me — saner, perhaps — that I am angry with him.'

'Angry,' murmured Gokal.



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'Yes, angry.'

Gokal glanced sideways again and saw that Hari's face was pale, his jaw set. He made a troubled gesture, and seemed about to speak when suddenly Hari went on: 'I know Amar better than you think, but that doesn't mean that I understand him. I am angry, but the man I really blame is myself. I should have gone across to the Pleasance that very evening.'

Gokal raised his hand in protest. 'Hari, for God's sake . . .!'

'I was a fool to listen to you. I should have obeyed my instinct. I should have killed Daniyal.'

Gokal shook his head.

'Yes, — But you spoke of Sita, and I was weak.'

'You had to consider Sita. And you know it.'

Giving a short laugh, Hari took a few steps away, then, coming back, he thrust his face forward and looked Gokal straight in the eyes. 'Do you think I am lying when I say that hate keeps me awake at night — rage at not having killed Daniyal? That evening it was different. What I felt then was not hate but a just anger. What I feel now is rage and hate.'

Gokal frowned and drew back. 'You are not in a condition to think clearly — or to feel rightly. If you like I'll give you something to make you sleep.' He paused. 'You must take care, Hari. Hill-men sometimes go mad in the heat of the plains.'

Hari laughed again. 'God has been playing tricks on me all my life. And some of them I resent. Look how he has thrown me into partnership with Daniyal!'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Haven't Daniyal and I been partners in injuring Amar? Can you deny it? If Amar lifted his hand against Daniyal, what — what, in God's name — can have brought him to do it? One thing only — and you know what. Daniyal taunted him.'

Gokal returned Hari's gaze with steadiness. 'You are not yourself; and you admitted as much to me last night. You agreed, too, that your first duty was not to hurt Sita.'

'A man has to live his life all the same. He must follow his nature. If I were to join Salim . . .'

'Hari!' said Gokal, interrupting him. 'I want to give you a warning. There are times . . .'

'Sita would have no right to blame me if I felt I must join Salim.'

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'If you were to do that *now*, it would not be from any good motive.'

'Good motives are for good men. And I am not a good man. And not all the good advice in the world is going to mend me.'

Gokal made a gesture of impatience, then said dryly: 'Your business is simply to ask yourself whether you love Sita — and then to behave accordingly.'

Hari gave a laugh. 'Oh, I love her! Make no mistake about that! But, if Daniyal and I were both dead, how much simpler the situation would be! How much better for the world — including, perhaps, Sita!'

Gokal shook his head.

Suddenly a change came over Hari, his voice became quiet. 'Sita has deep sanity and strength. Also a deep common sense in spite of all her romanticism. After my death she would turn to Amar, and together they would reach some kind of peace — some kind of happiness. They would reach it together. And what kind of happiness can she possibly reach' — he hesitated — 'in the present state of affairs? — You don't imagine that it amuses me to say this, do you?'

Gokal's voice, when he made his reply, was constrained and cold. 'It is very difficult for a man to know what he is really taking pleasure in.'

Hari stared, then cried impatiently: 'Please don't be enigmatic. What I said was simple enough. And you haven't denied the truth of it.'

'I am wondering about your motive — and whether you took pleasure in saying it. — You know,' he went on after a pause, 'men delight in destruction as much as in creation, in pain as much as in pleasure. There are many contradictory impulses in all of us.'

Hari appeared not to hear, and at the end of a long silence he said: 'A few weeks ago I thought I was moving towards Christianity. Sita influenced me. I did then think that I might become a Christian.'

Gokal made no reply.

'That was at Ravi — before Amar returned.'

With a sigh Gokal said: 'There is a question that I have been wanting to put to you for some time: the news you had at Kathiapur . . . I mean the news of Ambissa's disloyalty and Akbar's sentence of banishment . . . how much has it embittered you?'

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He was looking at Hari as he spoke, but the latter was staring straight in front of him, and after a few moments it became clear to Gokal that he had not heard a single word. This sudden abstraction of Hari's made him uneasy. It was too dark to see Hari's expression, but something disquieting communicated itself to him from the stiff, motionless figure at his side.

At last Hari raised a hand and laid it on his arm. 'If you really care to hear what's the matter, I'll tell you.' His voice was cold and ironical, almost contemptuous. 'Having reached this critical point in my life, I don't feel equal to the occasion. Do you understand?'

Gokal, taken aback, mumbled something inarticulate. He was still struggling with his perplexity when the stillness was broken by the neighing of a horse from somewhere far out in the dark.

'Are you expecting anyone?' he asked.

'Just the usual report from the cavalry-post.'

As Hari spoke a sound behind caused them both to look round. Someone with a lantern was coming from the castle. It turned out to be a soldier. He saluted and handed Hari a letter. While he was reading it a look of satisfaction spread over Hari's face.

'Ah ha!' Raising his head, he gave the man a smile. 'Something new at last! Well, it was time! — I shall join in this little game.'

The soldier replied with another salute and a grin that showed his white teeth.

Dismissing the man with a friendly nod, Hari took hold of Gokal by the arm. 'One of Salim's bands is reconnoitring in this direction. There will be a brush with them to-night, if we have any luck!'

'You intend to take part?'

'Why not?'

Gokal made no reply, and together they began to walk towards the castle door. After a moment Gokal stopped. 'Your sympathies are with Salim,' he said curtly, 'yet here you are, seizing this opportunity to fight against him. If you join in the affray it will be merely for the sake of fighting, not for anything else.'

'My God!' returned Hari. 'What can you expect?'

HARI moved towards a short flight of steps that was sunk in the terrace floor, and as he went down he drew from his pocket two keys. One of them fitted the lock of a door at the bottom of the stairs; beyond was a passage at the end of which, through the bars of an iron gate, there appeared the blue depths of the night sky. The second key unlocked this gate which he pushed open cautiously, cursing at each creak that came from its rusty hinges. After passing through he locked it carefully behind him and looked round.

Nothing was to be seen in any direction except in the south where a few small fires twinkled and glowed. The lights of the sunset had faded; it was now full night. At last the air had a little freshness, but it was still without a stir.

He looked and listened; then began to trudge forward over the thick, soft sand. Coming to a place where the ground was caked and gravelly, he was careful where he trod, for sand-vipers sometimes lay out on the stones at night. Before long the outline of some low, half-ruined buildings rose up before him, and a few human shapes became visible against the crumbling walls. No one advanced to his encounter, but a man in uniform detached himself from the group and saluted.

'Well!' Hari's tone was curt but friendly. 'You'll have to keep a good watch to-night.' And for a while the two stood talking together in undertones.

'I want a horse,' said Hari presently. 'And don't expect me back until to-morrow morning.'

The man went off, and he now approached the others. His manner was genial. There were jokes and a good deal of muffled laughter. In a few minutes a horse was led out from the doorway of what had evidently once been the castle stables. Hari examined the animal critically, pulled at the saddle, and altered the length of the stirrups. Then with a nod he was off.

At first his pace was leisurely, but presently he put his horse into a canter, and a little later where the ground was good, he went at full gallop. On slowing down again, he unwound his turban, wiped his brow, and stared up into the starry sky. The reins loose, he

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continued to stare upwards. It was not until his horse 'stumbled in a rat-hole and nearly threw him that he came back to himself.

About a mile away a low line of bluffs broke the smooth sweep of the horizon; he peered at it through the dark, then turned in his saddle to look all round him, and finally gave a peculiar call. It was answered by someone who, to judge by the sound, was about half a mile to his right. He called again, and soon a man came riding up. After a brief conversation Hari went on.

In a small hollow beneath the bluffs lights became visible, a horse neighed, and there was a faint jingle of accoutrements. A stable smell drifted past on the night air. Absent-mindedly Hari smiled; he was thinking of his first experience of camp-life when, as a youth of fifteen, he had joined his father's troopers and served a rough novitiate. A sudden impulse to play some practical joke came over him; but he could think of nothing better than to ride at full gallop right up to the door of the officers' tent, howling like a wounded hyena.

A man, still holding his glass in his hand, stepped out quickly and angrily, but, after seeing who it was, he gave a curt laugh and said: 'Come in, you fool. You're late.'

After handing his horse over to a groom, Hari stepped into the tent. At one end was a table at which half a dozen men were lounging. On another smaller table a rough map had been pinned out and three of the younger officers were bending over it.

'For God's sake give me a drink,' cried Hari, and someone pushed an earthenware jug towards him. He picked it up, put it to his lips, and continued to tilt it higher and higher until it was drained to the last drop.

'By the Beard of the Prophet,' cried the man, 'that's the first time I've seen Hari drink water.'

Eyes were fixed upon him in amusement, and the Commander of the Troop, a middle-aged man, with a fine face deeply tanned by the sun, narrowed his eyes and said: 'Is it as bad as that up at the castle?'

'It is.'

The Commander fingered his chin and said dryly: 'Well, in that case, your party will have to move out before long.'

'I don't know,' returned Hari. 'The well still fills, although it is a bit slow.' And, seating himself, he began to eat.

Of the men at the table two happened to be old acquaintances,

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and with the others he was on easy terms. Talking and eating desultorily, he felt his nerves relax. He found something familiar and agreeable in the knowledge that fighting was soon to take place. In this atmosphere his sense of purposelessness dropped away from him — also his sense of responsibility.

An hour later the troop set out, and he was again riding silently along under the bright stars; but this time he was one of a company of forty. What restfulness there was in it! To be an ordinary lancer, like any of the others, a man acting under orders. Free were his thoughts now to wander where they chose; and they took him back to Sita, back to the first days of their love. Those days were flushed with an extraordinary beauty, and the present beauty of the desert under the starlight made a fit setting for such memories.

What gave this starlit ride its peculiar value was the fact that he had no idea where or how it would end. His ignorance created a magical emptiness in which his enjoyment of the night, and of the stars, and of his love, could unfold itself. Self-consciousness was alive in him only in the thought: 'I am not thinking. What a relief!' And as his eyes wandered over the faces of the men jogging along beside him, he thought he saw everywhere the same absence of mind, the same pleasant torpor — the particular torpor that came to one at times like this. Danger was the wind that kept the insect cares of life away. If the present moment contained so much peace, that was only because it was sliding down a gentle slope into a future of action and danger.

Riding a little ahead was the Commander of the Troop. Hari's eyes rested upon him meditatively, for in him he saw a man who found so little happiness in life that his only solace was danger; and the peace of danger the only peace he knew. He was the husband of Jagashri Raneé, and had lived in perfect content with her for three years, until, suddenly seized by worldly ambition, she had abandoned husband and child in order to fight her way in Daniyal's coterie, achieving her end at the cost of her own and her husband's good name, and through the practice of vices for which she had no natural inclination. 'And now,' thought Hari, 'the man has lost his taste for life. Is he a fool? Or is all love like that?'

At a word of command the troop now drew up and divided into two unequal parts. The main body rode off, leaving Hari and seven others to wait where they were. In front there rose a high bank, so steep in some places as to be a cliff; but it was broken by a gully that

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had been worn down by a stream that was now dry. A few hundred yards on the left a long pale streak marked the course of another broader river-bed. While the Commander was issuing his instructions Hari remained inattentive, his eyes fixed upon the speaker's face. It was impassive and cast in a conventionally handsome mould. But the strong lights and shadows thrown upon it by the rising moon made it dramatically significant. The man spoke curtly, as if bored by his own words, but with a business-like incisiveness. Having finished, he wheeled his horse round and rode off into the gully.

Following the example of his companions, Hari now dismounted and stretched his limbs, while his horse shook itself and began sniffing at the ground which was here covered with a short brittle herb too bitter to eat. Through the branches of a twisted tree on the top of the bluff the moon was shining with brilliance. As he looked at it he was reminded of a Chinese picture that Sita had hung in her room at Ravi. Her delight in this picture had made him look at it attentively, and in the end he had obtained a good deal of pleasure from it. But never had he been able to persuade himself that he really cared much about art, and it occurred to him now that he greatly preferred this tree and this moon to the tree and the moon in the picture. Yet, he reflected, Sita had also a feeling for Nature at least as strong as his. 'She is superior to me in every way, and perhaps Amar is, too. What I said to Gokal is true, although I said it in anger. If I were dead she could eventually find in Amar someone more worthy of her than me.' Upon this there followed a painful train of thought; memories, some old, some new, rose up before him and he was filled with self-dislike.

To escape he turned his mind once more upon the Commander of the Troop. 'Are we not all of us,' he thought, 'in some degree humiliated by life — if not by our own fault then by the malignity of fate? Look at Jagashri's husband! As if it were not enough that she has shamed and deserted him for Daniyal's sake, he now finds himself so placed that he has to fight for Daniyal and will very likely find death in so doing. Why should the brave and honest continually be sacrificed to the cunning and corrupt? He turned and spat upon the ground; a vague all-embracing pessimism possessed him.

Then suddenly he was on his horse's back again. He had imitated his companions, who had sprung into their saddles and were now hurriedly pushing into the gully which was so narrow that it would

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barely hold two abreast. He found himself the last, and as the horse in front of him lashed out whenever he approached it, he was obliged to keep well in the rear. For a few hundred yards the ground was so thickly strewn with boulders that it was impossible to ride fast, but the men were excited and as soon as a smoother patch appeared the pace became wild. Hari spurred his horse forward; never had he felt a greater longing to exchange blows. At his first opportunity he got past the young man with the vicious mount, but only to meet with misfortune, for someone cannoned up against him and his horse went down. Dazed but unhurt, he soon picked himself up, and was delighted to see that his mount had already struggled on to its legs. Jumping into the saddle, he was off again, but by now his companions had disappeared, and on rounding the next corner he was presented with an embarrassing choice of ways. This forced him to dismount and search for hoof-marks; having found some, he was off again at a gallop.

Two minutes later he had caught up with a body of a dozen men, and although dimly aware that they belonged to the enemy he shouted and yelled in unison with them, while into his heart there leapt the exultant thought: 'What a joke! I am going to fight against Akbar and Daniyal after all!'

Suddenly, with the others, he came out on to the main river-bed. In front of him there stretched a space of gleaming white sand upon which two bodies of horsemen had already clashed and were wheeling about to make another encounter. Before he had time for any further thought he was in the midst of the affray; he was parrying blows and slashing; he had cut one man down and was manoeuvring to get at another, when he had to bend low to avoid a descending arm. Again his horse went down, and this time he was not so lucky; the world suddenly went dark.

When he came to himself, it took him some minutes to remember what had been happening, and his next discovery was that almost any movement gave him pain. He was lying on his side, and by lifting his head a little he could see that he was still on the spot where he had fallen. His horse had gone, everyone had gone, except five or six men who were either wounded or dead. Their shapes showed up black on the white sand. He let his head fall back and determined to lie still; but presently a feeling of wetness about his arm told him that he was wounded, and the fear of bleeding to death forced him to sit up. Several men were sitting up and attempting to



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staunch their wounds. While he was struggling to unfasten his tunic he heard voices and laughter — the loud, excited voices and the empty, drunken laughter of those who have passed through danger unhurt. Were they friends or enemies? And, if his legitimate friends, had they noticed that he had been fighting against them? For a few minutes he had to endure anxious uncertainty. Then two officers that he knew came up, and on their faces he saw nothing but friendliness. They bound his wound, which although deep, was not serious; it was in the upper part of his arm, and no vein was cut. While this was going on the whole troop assembled, nor was it long before he had made sure that no one had noticed that he had been fighting on the wrong side. 'Well!' he thought. 'Life is like that. And the responsibility is not mine'

SITA woke at dawn and went at once to her window. It was too early yet to expect to see Hari returning, but she kept anxious watch all the same. In a little while a servant came in and handed her a note. It was from Hari; he was safe! (His wound he described as trifling.) Her relief was like happiness, but it was a happiness that did not last long. 'This is only a foretaste,' she was thinking. 'How many hours, or days, of suspense has the future got in store for me?'

Still staring out over the desert she fell into a muse. She realized that during her first ecstatic days with Hari her detachment from the everyday world had been complete. It had been as though she and Hari and Amar were disembodied spirits whose problems could be worked out in a sphere of pure emotion and idea. Then, when the current of events had snatched her up, it had been so turbulent that her thoughts could not stray from the actual moment. Not until now was she finding time for recollection — time to perceive that the real — the truly searching — strain of living becomes felt only when the pressure of emergency is removed. She said to herself: 'While a big storm is raging one is not called upon to do anything more than keep one's ship afloat; one is allowed to run before the wind. But in ordinary weather there is no excuse for not determining one's course and holding on it.'

What was to be the shape, the texture, of her future life? How was she to reconcile the conflicting claims of her love for Hari and her love for Amar? Those two loves were so different! the one a call to life, the other a preparation for death.

After a while a knock at the door announced the coming of Gokal, and at once she assumed a cheerful expression. In Gokal's company nowadays she needed all her self-confidence. His devotion to Amar, to Hari, and to herself was, she knew, whole-hearted and clear-sighted; it was this that gave his judgments weight; but she also felt that, although he accepted the fact that she and Hari had become lovers, he yet remained unhappy about it. He moved in a cloud of misgivings.

The moment he appeared she formed the suspicion that he was screwing himself up to embark on difficult topics. And she was right. Gokal had long been wishing for some exchange of thought

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with her, for not once since Amar's disablement had she discussed her situation. No doubt the stress in which they had been living did to some extent account for this, but her silence might also be, he thought, a sign of fear.

'It has occurred to me,' she said presently, 'that this wound of Hari's is probably a blessing in disguise. After all, he was fighting for Akbar when he got it, and that ought to count for something.'

'Yes,' returned Gokal grudgingly, 'but . . .'

'But what?'

Gokal sighed and said: 'I doubt whether Akbar will withdraw his sentence of banishment; and I'm quite sure Hari doesn't intend to obey.'

'For the moment he can't obey. He can't desert us, can he? And we shall need him almost as much when we get home. He will have to stay with us — at least for a while. Akbar can hardly object to that.'

Gokal fingered his chin doubtfully. 'Do you remember how — long ago — I prophesied civil war? Only, of course, I didn't at all foresee how complicated *your* position would become.'

'What exactly do you mean?' And, as Gokal remained silent, she went on: 'I think you are making things out worse than they are. Hari must obtain an audience and explain that he is perfectly loyal; then Akbar will soon come round.'

'Akbar might. But is Hari really willing to fight against Salim?'

'Well! He has just been doing so!'

This was unanswerable, and Gokal acknowledged it by a sort of groan, but the next moment he sat up and said firmly: 'Sita, everything points to Akbar's naming Daniyal as his successor; and as soon as he does so fighting against Salim will mean fighting for Daniyal. I very much doubt whether Hari will be willing to do that.'

She made a gesture of impatience. 'But Akbar is not an old man yet! Why should he name any successor? I expect him to go on reigning for another fifteen or twenty years. And as soon as Salim has been put back into his place, people won't trouble any more about the succession. Why should they?'

Gokal slowly shook his head. 'It's true enough that Akbar is not yet old in years, but I feel, and he feels, and India as a whole feels — that his part is played. The spirit of the age has changed, and Akbar is no longer needed.'

'Well!' said Sita, 'if Akbar is left behind I am content to be left

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behind with him. But perhaps I don't really understand you, for sometimes you seem to imply that what is true for one age is not true for another. Do you want me to believe that Christianity can ever be out of date? No! And if Akbar is daily drawing nearer to Christianity, he is drawing nearer, as I believe, to the truth. His career as a soldier may be finished; but his career as a religious leader lies before him. Have you forgotten what Asoka did for India — not by violence but by persuasion and by the force of his example? Is it fantastic to believe that Akbar could spread the Gospel of Christ just as widely, just as rapidly, if he chose? And Christianity, once accepted, is never put aside.'

Again Gokal shook his head. 'As I see things, Akbar is now further removed from true Christianity than ever before. The Din Ilahi is only a substitute. In Christianity he would have had to embrace humility, in the Din Ilahi he identifies himself with God. As for Hari, I don't know what is passing in his mind, but I should be very much surprised . . .'

Sita was silent for a moment, then she said: 'I think Hari might feel shy of expressing himself to you. But — but I firmly believe that he is not far from accepting the Gospel. And if Akbar were to give him the lead, Hari, would I am sure, be fired with enthusiasm and become his chief lieutenant. You see,' she added, after a moment's hesitation, 'his nature is much simpler than yours. And if he once got hold of the essential truths of Christianity, he would find what he has always lacked — a guiding thread and a goal.'

Her eyes now were soft with an appeal to which Gokal made instant reply. 'Don't be afraid that I shall be a deterring influence.'

'I don't think you would ever intentionally . . .'

 She gave a sigh. 'But, as I have just said, Hari is much more simple-minded than you.'

'More simple-minded? I wonder. Certainly less *simple-natured*.' He looked at her doubtfully, then went on: 'I'm not sure whether you realize how much complexity can be concealed under a careless manner and the air of living in the moment. Such persons conceal their complexity even from themselves — and sometimes suffer for it.'

'How do they suffer for it?'

'In many ways — hard to explain.'

She showed that she was troubled. 'But after all there *are* simple-minded people in the world.'

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Gokal smiled. 'I suppose so. Besides, if each one of us didn't conceive a very simplified image of himself to live up to and illustrate in the ordinary way of life, he would soon get completely tired out. I admit that. But . . . but . . .' He interrupted himself. 'You must forgive me for talking as though I thought I knew Hari better than you! My excuse is . . .'

'Oh, you don't need any excuse!' She bit her lips and frowned a little. 'Gokal, I think you sometimes make things out more complicated than they are.'

'We are talking about the human spirit, and what in the world could be more complicated than that!'

She made no answer, and he smiled. But to himself he was saying sadly: 'You are one of the people who refuse to allow their simplified versions of themselves or of others to be disturbed. And that is dangerous.'

Sita gave a shrug. 'After all, the important things in life are exceedingly simple.'

On this silence fell between them. It lasted until the creaking of the boards in the passage told them that someone was approaching, and the next moment a servant came in to announce that an officer from the cavalry-post was downstairs and wished to speak to the Ranee.

Sita's face changed, and she rose to her feet. Then she turned to Gokal. 'I — no, I can't. Please — will you go?'

Gokal hurried from the room.

Three minutes later the servant came back with a slip of paper on which were scribbled the words, 'He has nothing to say about Hari. Hari is on his way here.'

Nearly an hour went by before Gokal re-entered the room. Sita was sitting in the same place. The desert, seen through the window, was pale and shimmering with heat; in the distance there glittered the mirage of a lake surrounded by palms.

Gokal stared out with a frown. 'It appears that the Commander has just received orders to fall back.'

'But . . .' Consternation gathered on Sita's face. 'That doesn't mean that we . . .?'

'Yes. I'm afraid it means that we shall be left unprotected here.'

'But we can fall back, too. In fact — we must.'

Gokal shook his head. 'I suggested that we should accompany

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them, but the man says that's not possible. He was polite, but firm. You see, the troop is a small, mobile, fighting force with duties that don't allow them to act simply as our escort.'

'But if we stay here . . .'

'I am afraid we must. We have just enough water, and there is nothing else to do.' He stopped, hesitated, then went on. 'Salim's men are now advancing very fast and in considerable force. It may be only a matter of hours before they get here. And when that happens — well, we shall come under Salim's protection.'

She leant forward with a start. 'Oh! but Gokal, what are you saying? For ourselves it doesn't matter, I know; Salim will treat us quite well. But what about Jali? He will be taken away and kept as a hostage.'

Before the other had time to reply she sprang up and went on: 'I *will not* let that wretched creature get hold of Jali! We must move at once.'

He put out his hand. 'Listen, my dear! The question of Jali is just what the Captain and I have been discussing. I suggested that the troop should take *him* along with them. But the Commander had already foreseen that request — and refused. Some difficult patrol work lies before him. He can't make himself responsible for a boy, a non-combatant. But he had a suggestion to make. He thinks that if Hari and Jali were to set out at once on good horses, they could get away. They would have to keep off the main roads and ride chiefly by night. In that way they would almost certainly get into safe country again. The brigands, who are no more than starving villagers, have no mounts, and Salim's men would soon be out-distanced. Besides, if caught by Salim, Hari and Jali would be no worse off than if they had been caught here.'

Sita turned away and took a few steps down the room. Her reply came in a muffled voice, 'If there is really nothing else . . .'

Gokal's eyes rested on her compassionately.

After a minute she faced round again. Her expression was now calm. 'It's hard. To lose them both like this . . . It has come so suddenly . . . but . . .'

Gokal went up to her and took both her hands in his. He noticed that she was trembling from head to foot. 'Let's think!' he said gently.

They went back to the window, and Sita once more fastened her eyes upon the blazing desert. Sitting at her side, Gokal made no

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attempt to speak. She needed time to think, she needed to recover herself after this new blow.

When at last they did talk again, their conversation, broken by long, meditative silences, did not carry them very far. Hari's presence was indispensable for a practical discussion of the journey. But Gokal also wanted to talk about Jali, and at last he said: 'I think Jali is going to be wildly excited.'

'Oh yes!' And Sita smiled, but sadly.

Gokal took his courage in both hands. 'Perhaps, too, a temporary separation from us all may do him good.'

'Does he need something to "do him good"?''

'I think he does. Do you know that during these last weeks he has been telling me that nothing will induce him ever to succeed his father as Rajah? I have said nothing to you about it, because he asked me not to. But now that he is going away . . .'

Sita knit her brows. 'Need one attach much importance to that kind of talk? He has often said to me, too, that he didn't care about politics or anything to do with public life; but I only laughed.'

'I don't say that his present feelings will last. But for the time being they are very strong. He wants to be quite independent for a while, and has begged me to do my utmost "when the time comes" to persuade you to let him go. I am telling you this now because the time does seem to have come.'

Sita turned away again, and he judged from her expression that she was going to let the matter drop. She was a strange woman, he thought. But then one always thought people strange when they were unlike oneself!

At last, however, Sita gave him a glance over her shoulder and said: 'Did you tell Jali you thought it would be a good thing for him to be away for a while?'

'Yes. But I didn't suggest it; and I added that it would not take him long to acquire a sense of independence — after which he would certainly want to return.'

'And be willing, when the time comes, to take up his position?'

'Certainly. I said that too.'

'Well!' Sita straightened herself, looked Gokal full in the face and gave a smile. 'In all this you may be right, but . . .' She turned to the window again, and at once gave a start of excitement.

Following the direction of her gaze Gokal saw a solitary horseman

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riding slowly towards the castle. He leant forward, shading his eyes against the glare.

‘That’s Hari!’ she cried.

‘It may be.’

‘I’m sure it is.’

They both got up, and she held out her hand to him. ‘Right or wrong, you are a very good friend.’



A FEW hours later Sita, Gokal, and Hari were gathered together in one of the lofty, dilapidated rooms downstairs. The shutters, closed against the heat, created an obscurity across which narrow beams of sharp, white light cut like the blades of swords. A low wooden table and two long divans were the only furniture in the room. Hari, his arm in a sling, was sitting close to the table, and before him were two jugs, one of wine and one of water. His face was flushed, his widely-open eyes had a look that was at once vacant and challenging. Sita was sitting on a cushion opposite. Her backward-tilted head and drooping lids told of fatigue. She was fanning herself with an ivory fan.

Hari took a draught of wine and said: 'Here are some papers which the Commander gave me to look at.' He pushed them across the table towards Gokal, who was seated in the window embrasure. 'Among them there's a map, which I shall take with me.'

Gokal turned the pages over, frowning at them through his spectacles. 'Apart from the map . . .'

'Akbar's latest Proclamation is there. Read it aloud to us.'

'I really don't think . . .'

'My dear Gokal, when His Imperial Majesty takes the trouble . . .'

'Oh, very well!' And cutting him short, Gokal began. After summarily dismissing the economic and political difficulties of the day, Akbar took his subjects to task for insufficiency of patriotic and religious fervour. Then he launched forth upon an impassioned call to the Din Ilahi, the 'true religion'. The pompous phrases rang hollow against the bare, discoloured walls of that empty room. From outside there came the cry of kites; and whenever Gokal paused to draw breath a loud buzzing of flies was audible. The air was full of these flies, whose bright green bodies, darting across the shafts of light, filled the room with a continuous faint twinkling.

Every now and then Hari interrupted the reading with a laugh; and at last Gokal stopped and said mildly: 'Do you really want me to go on?'

The question was answered by Sita with a frown and a shake of the head. Turning to Hari, 'We've finished,' she said. 'And I do wish you would go and get a little sleep. — Hari, please!'

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'As you like; but there's no hurry. We're not starting till midnight. Where's the map?'

As she handed it to him she gave Gokal a significant look. Gokal said: 'Let's recapitulate; after that, we'll all have a rest.'

'As you like.' And, leaning over the map, Hari went on: 'Starting at midnight, we ride due north for six hours — until daybreak. Then we hide, and . . .'

'Where do you hide?' put in Sita.

'Oh, anywhere! Among the rocks like the conies. Then at night-fall we ride on again, trending slightly eastward, until we get to Caligar which ought to be still in the hands of Akbar's men. There we ask whether it's possible to cut across country to Vidyapur which lies due west, or whether we had better give up the idea of Jali's reaching home, and push on in a straight line in the direction of Agra.' He looked up. 'That's simple enough, isn't it?'

Sita knit her brows. 'Thinking it over, I don't much like the idea of Jali's waiting for us at Agra. It might be weeks or even months, before we get there.'

'I agree with you,' said Gokal, and he rubbed his chin. 'Why shouldn't Jali throw himself upon the hospitality of one of the Rajputs? Any of them would be only too glad to show kindness to the son of Rajah Amar.'

'Just as you like!' returned Hari, cheerfully. 'Randhir, who lives in that part of the world, used to be quite a friend of mine. Yes,' he went on with animation, 'I should enjoy seeing old Randhir again, and with him Jali would have a grand time.'

'But *you* must go on to Agra,' said Sita decisively.

'Yes, of course, I shall go on to Agra and make my peace with Akbar, and after that' — he threw a smile at Sita — 'come back to you. I might be back in three weeks.'

There was a silence, then Sita sighed. 'That's hardly likely, and I'm not reckoning on it. If you make your peace with Akbar, you will probably have to prove your good faith by joining the Army again — at least for a time. My hopes are that we shall all be meeting again soon in Agra.'

'To go back to the question of Jali,' said Gokal after a pause, 'he would be very well off with Randhir, or Narayan, or Bhoj. In fact, in that neighbourhood . . .'

'The Rajahs are as thick as flies,' Hari interrupted. 'And when they see this handsome young fugitive turning up all dusty and

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travel-stained, they'll crowd round him, dress him up in silver and gold, and marry him to one of their daughters.' With a laugh he leant across the table and caught hold of Sita's hand.

The gaze she fixed upon him was charged with such a diversity of emotions that it seemed positively stern, but the next moment she turned to Gokal. 'Isn't Randhir a friend of the Sesodia's? I don't like that.'

Gokal pursed his lips and gave a little smile. 'Randhir knows him no doubt, but — are there any Rajputs who refuse to do that?'

'I see.' She took thought. 'Well, I suppose it will do Jali good to mix in that grand company for a while. But I only hope that when we all get home again, he won't think Vidyapur too dowdy for him.'

'I think,' Gokal began, 'that Bhoj of Daulatpur . . .'

'Daulatpur!' exclaimed Sita, and a light came into her eyes. 'Isn't that where the Holy Man Bhupendra lives? Oh, I wish Jali could stay with him. Isn't that possible?'

Gokal shook his head. 'Hardly, I'm afraid. The Guru lives in a little house all by himself outside the town. But Jali could go and see him.'

'Yes, we'll go and see him,' said Hari indifferently.

These words were followed by a pause, which, as it prolonged itself, showed that the conversation had — flatly and unexpectedly — come to an end. Sita rose to her feet and Hari did the same. Slowly he went up to her, and laid his hands on her shoulders. They looked at one another until her lips began to tremble; then, as she moved away, 'I'm going to take good care of Jali,' he said. 'You mustn't worry.'

Without looking round she hurried from the room.

Hari sat down again, stared at the table, and with one finger traced the pattern of a knot in the wood. For some minutes there was no sound but the buzzing of the flies.

'What can I do? What can I say?' Gokal was thinking, and within himself he groaned. 'Oh, the pitiable inarticulateness of men! Here we are — Sita, and Jali, and Hari, and I — here we are — together, alive, and with love in our hearts! But something swathes, and clouds, and muffles us. Even I, who see what is happening, can do nothing. What kind of a parting is this going to be? There is love, but love is not understanding. Why do neither Jali nor Hari speak to her as they do to me? Why doesn't she want

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it? Would they love her less if she were different? Or she them? Why are they all afraid?’

‘Well!’ said Hari, getting up, ‘I must go and have some sleep.’ His face was flushed and he walked heavily out of the room.

From the terrace Sita watched Hari and Jali ride away into the dark. In a few moments they were gone, but she continued to stand there looking after them. Gokal, who was a little way off, threw a glance in her direction and then remained still.

‘I am going in,’ she said at last, and, seeing that she was already walking quickly away, he checked his movement to accompany her. ‘Good-night, my dear,’ he called out; and her answer came to him in a strangled voice, ‘Good-night.’

A ray of light shone out from the castle door as she opened it, then all was dark again. Gokal began to pace slowly up and down. ‘Both gone!’ he was thinking. ‘And Amar remote — remote.’

After a minute he went round to the other side of the castle and looked up at Sita’s window. It showed no light. Nowhere did the castle show a single ray of light. ‘She is praying,’ he said to himself. ‘Thank God, she has faith! Moreover, she has inborn confidence, so that not only her beliefs but her hopes and expectations are firm. Her religion takes her to a world hardly less concrete than the world of everyday life, for her mind invests even eternal things with concreteness. In her vision souls are joined to their resurrected bodies and tread a heaven of flowery meadows. There they enjoy a bliss the foretaste of which she has already had. The awful infinities of time and space that oppress our imagination have no hold upon her.’

Recalling his own terrors, he remembered how as a child he had shuddered when told that to measure the present age — this evil Iron Kalpa — one should imagine a granite pillar as high as Gauri-Shankar, and an angel wearing it down by drawing a silken scarf over it once every year. This age would last for as long as that pillar.

From images such as this Sita was protected by a sturdier conception of reality. For her, he reflected, the touchstone of reality was apprehensibleness. This was, of course, to place the human being at the very centre of things. But wasn’t it only common sense to do that? For what meaning could one find in the word reality unless it meant reality for human beings?

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Moreover, within the boundàries of her common sense, she found freedom for her romantic and artistic imagination. She knew how to live in the past — in chosen moments that were eternally *there*. For her such moments had a life similar to that of a poem or a piece of music; just as she could open a book to find a certain poem, so she could turn to a passage in her past life and live it over again.

‘Yes,’ he said to himself, ‘and I know well enough which are the hours that she is reviving now.’ Within the castle’s four walls there was a magic spot inside which Ravi — the house, the garden, the hillside — lay outspread in bright sunshine and cool air.

THE next day the heat was greater than ever, and at noon a dust storm swept over the castle, blotting out the sun. Dust filled every room, and in the howling, choking obscurity Sita prayed for the travellers, but, even while she was praying, images of disaster floated before her eyes.

As soon as the storm had passed everything was as before. But she was lonely and anxious, and the days went by more wearily than ever. Disappointment, too, dragged her down. She had conceived a faint hope that after Hari's departure Amar might become less inaccessible; that hope was now fading away.

There came a morning when some officers in Salim's army rode up and informed the occupants of the castle that they must now look upon themselves as the Prince's prisoners. But that again made no difference. And a letter dispatched to the Prince remained without answer. Nothing changed. There was no going forward and no going back, and no one would tell them how much longer they would be obliged to remain where they were.

Then at last the drought broke. That morning the sun in its rising was like a harvest moon; all day it moved behind a dull, red haze; and as it sank there rushed up out of the south a towering curtain of darkness. This was the most spectacular of all the storms that Sita had seen since her arrival in India; but, fearful as it was, she blessed its coming. Standing with Gokal on the terrace, she watched and waited. The lightning glared in moss-like patterns upon the approaching murk; the boom and crackle of the thunder grew louder every moment; and then, just after she had retreated indoors, wind struck the castle, and all became confusion. The building rocked; the dry, brittle shutters were split into pieces and flung across the room; rain swept in, lights were extinguished, doors burst open. She stood in the middle of her room, facing the window through which the storm entered in a direct blast. Her hair flying, her face and body wet, she stood with eyes closed and head tilted back in an ecstasy of relief.

The storm lasted all night, but dawn broke upon a world refreshed. The air, washed free of dust, was cool and clear; the wet sand of the desert glittered like the sea. Leaning out of her window,

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she felt too weary to think, but not too weary to feel thankful and at peace. Earth and sky were plainly rejoicing.

And then — most strangely — they found an audible voice. There rose upon the air a sound of joyful singing, and round the corner of the castle she caught a glimpse of wayfarers — happy people, wholly unlike those that had been passing before. These, her servant told her, were pilgrims: they came from a district that famine had not touched, and they were making their leisurely way to a shrine in the south, there to celebrate the birthday of the eternally-youthful Indra. His was a birthday happier than those of mortals, for it brought the god no nearer to old age and death.

That day — to her surprise, for never had he done it before — Amar sent for her, and at once on entering she saw upon his face a look that made her heart leap up. His sternness was gone, and in his new gentleness he seemed not unhappy. Although he still kept his eyes closed, she no longer felt his spirit to be withdrawn.

What exactly were her hopes at this moment? For weeks she had wanted him to speak, and she had wanted his words to be kind; but how his kindness was to make happiness possible for him, for Hari, or for her — that was beyond her imagining. In the few minutes that she stayed with him not much was said; but something, not easily to be explained, took place; miraculously she was freed from her anguished sense of separation. It was with a heart overflowing with gratitude that she left him; and at once, hurrying to her room, she went down on her knees and wept. This, she told herself, was only the beginning; this was as far as he could go in one step; the next day, assuredly, he would send for her again.

But she was mistaken. What the morrow brought forth was very different.

Early in the morning, Gokal was woken by her servant, who in a shaking voice summoned him to her room. He found her lying in bed, her arms by her sides, a letter open on the coverlet. She was staring straight before her, and at his entrance she scarcely moved.

‘Amar has gone,’ she said.

‘Gone?’

‘Yes.’ And she told him that the old man who was Amar’s personal attendant had come to her about an hour ago with the news that his master had disappeared in the night.

‘By himself? Last night?’ stammered Gokal.

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‘Yes. He has joined the pilgrims. Their way lies south — like his.’

Gokal gave a groan, went to the window, and there stood silent.

The sun was just above the horizon; a light vapour, like steam, was rising from moist patches of ground. Here and there upon the pilgrims’ road small groups of wayfarers were visible. Gokal’s eyes fastened upon the farthest, which appeared as a tiny speck in the distance.

‘You have a letter,’ he said at last. ‘Is it from him?’

There was no answer, and, turning, he saw that tears were choking her utterance. But she nodded, and after a minute motioned him to her and whispered: ‘It is a loving farewell, a beautiful farewell. Listen!’

Gokal seated himself at her side, and she, reading a passage here and there, told him what the letter contained. Amar began by reminding her that his intention to retire from the world was a long-considered one; he assured her that his present action was not the fruit of recent events. Especially he begged her not to give way to self-reproach, nor to feel reproachful of him. His behaviour since his injury must have been incomprehensible to her, and his departure might make it appear the more unkind. He besought her not to try to understand, but simply to forgive.

Then, turning to the future, ‘I want you,’ he said, ‘to feel happy in the knowledge that by following the promptings of your heart you will be doing what I wish you to do. I have no advice to offer, and no requests to make. I am certain that in the ordering of your life and Jali’s you will do what you think right. Follow your light with confidence, just as I am following mine. Something as inevitable as death is parting us; in that thought let us find peace. That you love me I do not doubt, nor must you ever doubt that I love you’.

When she had finished Gokal took her hand in his and together they stared at the empty patch of sky that appeared through the window. In imagination they saw the level desert beneath, and the long narrow track along which those little groups were crawling. Amar was there. He was carrying a begging-bowl; he was dressed as one who begs his daily food. He was no longer Rajah Amar; he was no longer the man they knew. At last Gokal got up and again went to the window. Standing there, he said: ‘I was going to ask you whether I should go after him — not of course to make en-



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treaties, but just to say good-bye — and to take any message that you might wish to send. But now I am not sure.'

'No,' she answered. 'I don't think we ought to do anything. In another part of his letter he says that he will send us both messages when he reaches Madura. And he promises that occasionally — in the years to come — he will write.'

Suddenly she covered her face with her hands and cried out: 'Oh, the years to come! The years to come! What do they hold for us all?'

In the slow passage of the days that followed — days in which nothing in their outward life was changed — Gokal's sadness increased rather than diminished. Moreover, a sense of stagnation, of isolation, of powerlessness, had descended upon him. He had it in his heart to envy Amar his freedom; Amar, body and spirit, was going forward upon a deliberately chosen path.

One evening, seized with a particularly acute unrest, and wishing to conceal his state from Sita, he withdrew to his room earlier than usual. As he paced up and down the floor, he lost himself completely in unhappy musings. His thoughts went back to the day after the storm when Sita had come to him with a face of joy to announce the change that had taken place in Amar: how at last he had spoken, how at last a new period had begun. That day had seemed to be one made for gladness and thanksgiving. At intervals all through the morning the song of the passing pilgrims had risen on the freshened air, sounding, as Sita said, almost supernatural — as it were a celestial choir.

Pausing by the open window, he noticed that the night was cool and starry, but the constellations that he gazed upon had no message for him, and although he murmured some verses from the Star Hymn in the Veda, the words that rose to his lips were unaccompanied by any feeling or thought. 'My spirit is underground,' he murmured, 'burrowing in the dark of its own disquiet.'

He was still pacing up and down, when, about an hour later, his attention was caught by a faint sound that came from the passage outside. He moved his eyes in the direction of the door, and stood still. For a minute nothing happened, then the door began to open, making way for a grizzled head. The head turned, revealing a wrinkled face; and a pair of mournful eyes looked into his. He recognized the old man who day and night had watched

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over Amar ever since his injury, and for a few moments he was held dumb by a vague, anxious astonishment.

‘Nihal! What do you want?’

The watery eyes continued to blink at him.

‘Come in, and shut the door.’

With strangely furtive movements Nihal obeyed.

‘What do you want? Speak!’

Still there was no answer, and Gokal’s heart contracted. Nihal was standing in an attitude of abjection that contrasted singularly with his usual bearing.

‘You have something to tell me!’ Gokal strode up to him.

‘Speak, man! What have you been holding back?’

On several occasions he and Sita, sometimes singly and sometimes together, had questioned the old man. It was difficult to believe that Nihal could not, if he so chose, shed some light upon the mystery of his master’s behaviour since his injury. But it had been impossible to penetrate Nihal’s reserve.

‘O Learned One!’ The old man’s voice was a whimper. ‘I am ill.’

Looking into his face, Gokal saw that this might be true; but was it the whole truth?

‘Ill? Perhaps an evil conscience is the cause.’

Nihal sighed. ‘I always served my master well. It was my pride to serve him as he should be served.’

Gokal laid a hand on Nihal’s shoulder. ‘That I believe.’

‘A proud man he was! A man like a polished sword!’ Nihal covered his face with his sleeve. ‘Do you remember, O Learned One, how, when those pigs of carriers slipped and dropped him, he lay still, like a fallen Buddha, in the mud? He never uttered a word.’

Gokal frowned. He had witnessed the accident. It had happened on a stormy day as they were going down through the steep forest from Ravi to Kathiapur. He remembered how pale and mask-like Amar’s countenance had been.

Suddenly turning away, he took a few steps up and down the room. ‘You have something to tell me,’ he said. ‘Open your conscience, and quickly.’

Nihal, staring into vacancy, whispered the words: ‘I am guiltless and yet demons are eating away my strength and my life.’

Gokal waited.

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'I swore I would not speak.'

'To whom did you swear?'

'To the Maharajah — to my beloved master.'

Gokal gave no sign.

'O Learned One!' said the old man, 'do you promise to preserve my secret?'

'I promise nothing. You must trust me.'

Nihal looked Gokal straight in the eyes. 'Listen, then, to the sacred truth!' he said. 'The Maharajah, my master, is blind.'

Gokal stood still for a few moments, then stepped back, and dropped with trembling limbs on to his bed. 'What? What do you say? Blind!'

'The Maharajah is blind, completely blind. He was blind from the day that blow fell. He hid it from all but me; it was his will that none should know it.'

Gokal sat there trembling. Once or twice he opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

The old man breathed a deep breath, drew himself erect, and stood upright before Gokal, an image of dignified sorrow. 'Learned One, these words of mine fall upon you like the blow that blotted out the Maharajah's sight. I will leave you now that you may grieve alone. I will wait outside. When you call me, I shall hear.' With these words he left the room.

A few hours later, as dawn was breaking, Gokal, Nihal, and his son Panna, set out southward over the desert. They were riding camels, for horses would have been useless in the patches of heavy sand that lay upon their way; and Gokal reckoned that, although the pace must be slow, by making forced marches he might well overtake Amar in about a week. He had left the castle without taking leave of Sita, for he felt he had no right to betray Amar's secret. To explain his strange behaviour he had left a letter in which he said that unspoken doubts and misgivings had at last resolved themselves into a clear decision; he felt it right that he should allow himself one last conversation with Amar. He gave her his word that he would say nothing that she would mind, and added that he would probably be back in a fortnight.

ON the day before the storm Amar had risen from his bed at day-break and fallen to pacing up and down the room. He knew this room now sufficiently well to be able to move about in it at his ease. He knew, too, that dawn was breaking from the feel of the air upon his face. Indeed, by standing at the window he could generally tell with fair accuracy what hour of the day or night it was.

On most nights he spent an hour or two in silent pacing to and fro, for although he had confidence in Nihal, who kept constant watch outside his door, an additional sense of secrecy and security came to him from the knowledge that the world was dark and everyone sunk in sleep.

On this morning he felt sure that a storm was on its way. He knew it from the heaviness of the air, the stillness, and above all the heat. 'Pray God it may come quickly!' he murmured. 'Quickly, quickly!' And as he continued his silent movement to and fro, he reflected with anguish that after a drought such as this a storm might take twelve hours or even more to break.

Every day since his arrival at the castle his restlessness had increased. Every day, while he forced himself to lie quiet on his couch, the torrid, silent, motionless world stagnating round him, became more hateful — so hateful that he had become afraid of going mad.

But this day was the worst of all. And still he held himself under control. At her accustomed hour that evening Sita came in, and he gave no sign of the torment within him. As usual during her visit he suffered from a sense of humiliation, both on account of his blindness and of the concealment he was practising. After she had gone he leapt up with a convulsive movement from his bed. 'Yes,' he cried out within himself, 'this day has seen the climax of my sufferings! The end is certainly near.'

What end? He stood there rigid, not knowing why he had sprung up, nor what his own words signified. Groping in the darkness of his mind, he went on: 'It is now nearly two months that I have been blind. For nearly two months I have questioned, and travailed, and prayed; but some demon has held my spirit in a trance. Has the evil spell worked itself out? Is the hour of freedom at hand?'

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A little later, while he was pacing to and fro, the first rumblings of thunder came to his ears. He went to the window, leaned out, and drew the air deep into his lungs. Again the thunder rolled, faintly the air stirred, a cool breath passed over his face.

Returning to his bed, he called to Nihal. 'Stand by the window,' he cried exultantly, 'and tell me what you see!'

The old man, startled by his voice, looked at him hard, then intuition stirred, and an answering light came into his own wrinkled, weary face. Shuffling to the window he sniffed the air. 'It comes, my master, it comes!' he made report. 'A wall of darkness such as I have never seen before! Higher and higher it climbs into the sky; and the lightning, running over it, is like a writing traced by God. Ha! was that not good? A noise like the snapping of a thousand swords! Verily, my eyes are dazzled, and now I smell the burning of the sky. And now I hear the wind! And now a rain-drop — a rain-drop has fallen on my hand.'

An hour later, when the turmoil was at its height, peace came to Amar. Lying upon his bed, his face turned to the in-driving wind and rain, he marvelled at what had befallen him. For the first time since his loss of sight the tension of his spirit was relaxed; but why he did not yet know. Hour after hour, while the storm raged, he meditated upon the mystery.

The anguish that had descended upon him, when, returning to consciousness, he had discovered himself to be blind — that anguish he saw now as having been largely made up of humiliation and self-contempt. For a long time his chief concern had been to conceal his disablement. Pride insisted that he wear a mask. His sufferings behind that mask were of no account. The world must be kept at a distance. That was all that mattered.

Intermixed with this pride there had been jealousy and anger — an enormous anger which he had directed mostly upon himself. But all that was over now. He had risen above those storms; he had detached himself from earth, and was floating in an upper sphere of calm.

His thoughts turned to Sita. Did he love her still? Had he ever loved her? The answer was yes. And now, surveying the years that he and she had lived together, he was able to see what in them had been good, and what bad. He saw what on each side had been possible, and what had lain beyond their reach.

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All through the night his meditations continued, and more than once his last long conversation with Gokal came up into his mind. He realized that he had closed his eyes to many things that were true because he did not wish to see them. But, although Gokal had been right in many things, he was not right in the main. For the Truth possessed a fixed, determinate shape — the shape discerned once and for all by the Blessed One — and that Gokal was unable to understand.

On this he paused, and now he became aware that not only had the wind gone down, but the monotonous drumming of the rain had also ceased. The castle was enveloped in stillness — a refreshing stillness that was pleasantly broken by a heavy drip from the eaves. Then, a little later, some change in the quality of the air told him that dawn had broken; and with his inward eye he saw the wet face of the desert glittering under the sun's first rays.

His visual imagination had recently become keen. At times he saw the world more vividly than he had ever seen it with his uninjured eyes. Moreover, the images that rose up before him in this fashion were not pictures of familiar scenes only, they were sometimes revelations of things new. Sometimes there came to him a vision of a Himalayan peak lifting itself up into the starry night; and while his spirit, floating on level wings, explored its black rock and precipitous ice, that ghost would stand firm before him. No matter then if his body lay sweating in the desert heat; there in that starlit cold his spirit sailed and wondered. There it knew peace that was also an ecstatic avidity.

Such a peace he felt now. A cool air was coming in through the window, an air so sweet that in his dreams he fancied it to be carrying the notes of a song. Yes, he dreamt of a distant singing, and listened in wonder as that singing gradually grew louder and more real. At last he perceived that he was not asleep. He raised himself on one elbow. That chant! he recognized both the music and the words.

Sinking back after a moment he lay completely still. An idea had sprung full-formed into his mind, and he was looking at it with amazement and delight. The long-imagined moment was arriving at last; and it was as though his blindness were actually showing him the way. Here, moving past his very door, was a devout company who would receive a blind pilgrim kindly and help him on his road. Into that company he would glide and disappear.

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It was a little later in the morning that he sent his message to Sita. To tell her what he intended was not possible, but he could speak words which she would remember afterwards and understand. After she had left him a sudden sadness enveloped his spirit. The whole of human life from its beginning in an unfathomable past to its end in an unimaginable future seemed to him dull and grey. His sky was overcast; there were no black shadows anywhere; the whole panorama of human life stretched out before him with its little separate tragedies of light and shade all blent in a universal grey.

Presently he set himself to write her a letter of farewell. This took some time, not because he was uncertain what to say, but because his blindness made the act of writing difficult. When he had finished he gave in to his weariness and slept.

The rest of the day passed quickly. Filled with wonder and gratitude, he was now able to smile at the anguish in which he had so recently been floundering. Why not be blind? Sight was a distraction that he could well dispense with; its absence was likely to prove more precious than its possession. Blindness was the tunnel that was to lead him out into the perfect daylight of Nirvana.

His meditations were unhurried; his mind undisturbed by excitement; and when night came he was again ready for sleep.

Two hours before dawn Nihal entered the room. Over his arm he carried a peasant's clothes, and an old pair of sandals was in his hand. Standing by the bed he let his lamp shine down into Amar's face, but the light did not wake him. For a while he looked down, then put out his hand, and at the touch on his shoulder Amar woke. The old man, forgetting that those eyes, now open, were still sightless, turned his face away. 'It is time. Shall I help my master to dress?'

Amar got up, and in a few minutes he had made ready, for there was not much to be done. Standing in the middle of the room, he passed his hands over the rough cotton garment in which he was now clothed; he tried first one foot then the other, and finally bent down to take his sandals off again. 'We must make no noise,' he explained. 'Come, let us be off!'

Nihal covered his face with his sleeve, and there was a pause during which Amar stood waiting. At last, stretching out, he felt for Nihal, laid a hand on his shoulder, and said: 'You have been my friend and helper for all these long weeks. Come, friend, I need you now as a guide.'

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Nihal raised his head. 'One moment, master. I must get the lamp.'

He fetched the lamp from the table, laid Amar's hand on his shoulder again, and together they left the room. The castle was all dark; the big door made no sound as Nihal opened it, for he had previously oiled the hinges. Before going out on to the terrace he extinguished the lamp.

A few minutes later Amar felt the soft sand of the desert underfoot. He drew a deep breath.

'Are there stars?' he asked.

'Yes, master. The stars are still bright.'

After they had gone a little way, Nihal stopped, knelt down, and tied the sandals on to Amar's feet.

For about an hour they went on in silence, then Amar halted, and with his face lifted up, turned this way and that, and said: 'The dawn — where is it? Is it still dark — quite dark?'

'Yes, master.'

'How far is the nearest encampment?'

'I see a fire about two miles ahead. They are cooking their meal before making their start at daybreak.'

Amar struggled with himself. 'And the castle? Is the castle still to be seen? Does it show any lights?'

Nihal looked round. 'No,' he said sadly. 'Behind us all is dark.'



DAWN found Amar sitting among a group of pilgrims by their camp-fire. Occasionally he turned his face to the east to feel the growing warmth of the sun upon his skin. All about him there was confusion and noise. Children stumbled over him, dogs came and sniffed at the stranger, their noses wet against his hands and feet. Someone put a bowl into his hands, and he ate not unwillingly. He was filled with a deep peace, and at the centre of his peace there glowed a quiet exultation.

Before long the camp broke up; he was assigned his place, and the day's march began. At noon there was an interval of rest, then the journey was resumed, and it went on till night fell. To Amar the effort of trudging through the heavy sand was welcome; he was walking into a mist of indifference that grew thicker at every step.

Yet was it indifference? Was he not rather sinking into repose — the repose of a release from the tension under which he had been suffering for nearly all his life? Some strain was relieved, some oppression removed. At last he was alone — not lonely but blessedly alone. Self-consciousness had relaxed its hold. These people that pressed round about were no more to him than his inanimate surroundings. They were circumstances not persons; they neither impinged nor encroached; they were as the wind, the dust, the heat, the heaviness of the sand through which he was stumbling. Nor were the efforts and discomforts of the day disagreeable to him. Sitting weary beside the fire at the end of a long march, he would breathe deeply and smile to himself; and no one would ask him why.

His body disowned, he found his self-respect in the realm where his spirit moved free. He lived as a spirit communing with itself; the little house of flesh in which that spirit lodged was not even a home, it was a wayside inn.

After a few days the messages that came to him from his senses seemed to have travelled from very far; sound and smell, touch and taste, reached him only as ghosts of themselves. A woman one morning scalded his leg by overturning a pot of hot water. The pain startled him back to earth, but did not keep him there long. Its claim upon his attention was too irksome to be heeded.

His spirit was moving along the road of its choice, and yet some-

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thing was happening that he did not understand. It had no place in his philosophy. The self with which he communed was becoming other than him. It was becoming as God. He did not attempt to understand. Understanding would come to him later.

After these spiritual absences he returned to the world of his fellow-creatures with pleasure. His spirit, coming down like a sea-bird to rest and rock for a while upon a solid element, took satisfaction in companionship and the homeliness of material things. The noisy bustle that sprang up every evening at camping-time was agreeable to him. He would talk with his neighbours by the fire in an unthinking intimacy that was without forethought or after-thought. Very different was this intercourse from any that he had known before. In his former life, as it now seemed to him, there had always been a criss-cross of sensitivities, each alert self-consciousness unnecessarily aware of the others. What a waste of precious energies! A spirit, after its nonage, should be so greatly at ease with itself, so content with its own companionship, so secure in its own home, that, coming forth to meet others, it is radiant with a childlike unself-consciousness, friendly and unafraid. Yes, that should be for him the sign of his inner emancipation — the power to mix with his fellow men without pride, without pretence, without concealments and without shame.

When he looked into the future it was with a sense of happy, quiet expectation. Let this slow journeying take weeks, or months, or years! He would reach his destination in the end. And that — his last earthly dwelling-place, which he would never see except with the eye of the mind — was a small, whitewashed room looking out upon the green of grass and shrubs and palms. Beyond lay a little, oval lake, reflecting at sunset the pink of the evening sky. And on the opposite bank, its grey walls running down into the water, stood the temple — which he would get to know well.

As for the past, some day in that quietness he would review it all. Sitting in his cell, he would turn over the pages of Rajah Amar's life, and from the burden and sin of that life he would feel himself to be redeemed.

After travelling over the desert for eight days Gokal felt almost certain that he had overtaken Amar. He was arriving at a small oasis, which he knew the pilgrims to have reached only a few hours before. It was now afternoon. Exhausted from having journeyed

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through all the heat of the day, he threw himself down in an abandoned hut to rest and take thought.

Outside, a dry wind rustled in the stiff palm-leaves. His body ached, and in his mind there was also the dull ache of misgivings and self-doubt. Had he done right to come? How would Amar receive him? From time to time, above the rustling of the palms, a distant murmur came to him on the wind; it came from the pilgrims' encampment which was on the other side of the palm-grove, only a few hundred yards away.

An hour before sunset he rose and stepped out of his hut. Nihal and Panna were squatting in the shade of the wall. He looked away, and, ashamed of showing hesitation, walked straight into the grove. Under the roof of leaves the air was cool, and a musty smell came up from the brittle, dead leaves underfoot. Once out of sight he moved slowly, and so preoccupied was he that he stumbled as he went along. His many hours of camel-riding had stiffened him; his head ached, his lips were cracked, and his eyes sore. But he was conscious of nothing but an anguished anxiety coupled with an inability to foresee what lay before him. In the hut he had hoped to sleep, hoping that sleep would help him; but he had lain awake thinking, and his thinking had been in vain.

Not once — no! not once since the day of his disablement had Amar made any sign. And four weeks had now passed since his secret departure. What changes had those four weeks wrought? What manner of man was he about to meet? .

On reaching the edge of the encampment he stopped, and looked down from behind a broken wall. In a hollow beside a muddy pool a few rude shelters had been raised, and from a dozen fires smoke went up vertically into the still air. A ragged group was gathered round each fire, the women busy over their pots, the men idle, the children playing, while dogs and goats wandered about at their will. Many a time had Gokal's eyes rested upon a scene just like this, but never before with much interest. Now he was staring with anxious intentness, his attention caught by every detail. It was here, in the midst of this, that Amar was living his new life.

With a pounding heart and panting breath Gokal stood there, directing his gaze from face to face in an agony of mingled hope of apprehension. Had Nihal, after all, been mistaken? Was this the right company? Or was it conceivable that Amar, somehow forewarned, had hidden himself?

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This last supposition so unmanned him that he retreated into the shadow of the palms, and there, in the stress of his perplexity, stood motionless, the perspiration rolling down his forehead. He was reminding himself that if, during the passage of twenty years, Amar had always approached him with confidence and felt at ease with him, that was because they each had the same reserve and the same respect for reserve in another. He remembered how intolerant Amar was of any quality of insistence or oppressiveness in another’s personality. ‘Up till now,’ thought Gokal, ‘I have never offended. Am I going to offend at last?’

In the quiet and dark of the palm-grove he stood listening to the varied noises that came from the encampment. Amar was there — only a few yards away! Amar, to whom he was united by a friendship of over twenty years! He had known Amar before his marriage to Sita, even before his conversion to Buddhism; he had known him as a boy. Was it possible to turn back and let him go? Let him go like this? Knowing what he did, could he let him go without a word? It was not possible. ‘Surely,’ he thought, ‘by diffidence, by humility, by love, my action can be robbed of offence?’

On this he turned and went back to his place of observation. Once again, and more closely than before, he examined the faces of the men before him, beginning with the nearest. In this scrutiny he had not gone far before a bewildering suspicion formed itself in his mind — a suspicion which in another minute became a certainty. Amar was sitting within a stone’s-throw of him. Amar was the man beside that fire opposite! Those wild eyes that occasionally wandered in his direction were Amar’s.

It was a moment of confounding emotion, for although this was Amar it was not anyone that he knew. Nor could he approach this man without wonder and fear. Pity itself was in abeyance as he stared at the altered face. The sinking sun shone full into it, shone and glittered upon eyes that bore the light with a horrible insentience. Hair damp with sweat was pushed carelessly back from a forehead, the wrinkles of which were ingrained with dirt. Dust whitened the eyebrows and clung to a four-weeks’ growth of beard upon the cheeks and chin. A cotton shawl, torn, revealed a sun-blistered chest. And this man was sitting cross-legged, and scratching himself; and on his face there was an incomprehensible smile.

‘Is he mad?’ thought Gokal. ‘Can it be?’

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Trembling, he continued to watch, and presently Amar turned his head to speak to the man beside him. There was nothing in the manner of his speech that suggested madness. He and his neighbour exchanged a few words laughingly.

For half an hour or more, until the sun dipped beneath the horizon, Gokal remained there. Then in the sudden tropical dark he moved furtively away. He stumbled through the palm-grove; he knocked against the tree-trunks; he did not know what he was doing. Tears were running down his face, but he did not know that either. Somewhere in his heart there was thankfulness, for he had seen enough to be sure that Amar had found peace.

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## PART TWO

THE darkness was welcome to Jali as he said good-bye to his mother on the terrace, for he knew that there were tears in her eyes, and tears had sprung into his own. But a little later when he felt the sand of the desert under his feet, and saw the dim shapes of the waiting horses, and heard the last words passing between Hari and the grooms, a happy excitement took hold of him.

He mounted eagerly, but, before riding off, looked up. There were the figures of his mother and Gokal silhouetted against the sky. He waved to them, they waved back; and then he was trotting away.

The stars above seemed bright, yet the darkness that lay upon the desert was deep. The stillness, too, was profound, making the breathing of the horses and the creaking of the saddle-bags sound unnaturally loud. Hari presently broke this stillness by talking in a matter-of-fact way about the distance they could hope to cover during the night.

What Hari was really thinking and feeling he could not tell; the only thing Hari showed plainly was his satisfaction at escaping from the enforced inaction of the life in this evil place. This feeling Jali shared. The hazards of the journey down from Ravi had been thoroughly to his taste, and the adventure now lying before him promised to be more exciting still.

All night long the ride continued over the same level waste, and when day dawned they were still in a desert where no living thing was to be seen. A cold wind blew from the north-east, chilling the blood and filling the eyes with dust. As he stared about him in the gathering light he was overwhelmed by the inhumanity of the scene; but even while he clutched his cloak about him and tried to shield his eyes from the wind, his heart exulted. He was glad to be here, a part of this desolate world. 'To-morrow,' he thought, 'we shall be gone, but the desert, and the wind, and the brightening sky will be just as they are now. No one will feel this wind, no one will look up into this sky, and nothing will be left of us but a few hoof-marks in the sand.'

He was still sunk in a muse when an exclamation came from Hari, whose hand was raised to point to a small, dark speck in the distance.

'Whoever that may be I intend to have a talk with him,' he said.

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Before very long a ragged, surly-looking young man was standing before them and eyeing them with mistrust. He had a gun slung across his shoulder, and was leading his horse, which had gone lame. The conversation which took place between him and Hari was in a language that Jali could not understand. He noticed, however, that it began inauspiciously; but after a lengthy and emphatic speech from Hari the man's manner changed. He in turn began to speak volubly and with vehemence. In the end both seemed well pleased. Hari detached from his saddle a skin of water and some dried mangoes, which he handed over as a parting gift.

'Well!' he said as they rode on, 'I have rarely heard news that I liked better.' There was a look of grim satisfaction on his face, and, clapping Jali on the back, he cried out: 'The Pleasance of the Arts has been burnt to the ground — burnt down with everything in it! and not a few of Daniyal's friends have lost their lives! Unluckily, Daniyal himself escaped. But it was a fine piece of work, and all praise to those who did it!' Snatching the turban from his head, he waved it at the rising sun. 'All praise to those who did it!' he shouted in a voice that Jali had never heard before. 'May Allah reward them in Paradise!' At a prick from his spurs, his horse bounded forward, and Jali followed close behind.

A short gallop brought them to a dry water-course, the eastern bank of which provided a narrow strip of shade. Here they dismounted to eat and drink, and here, Jali thought, they would spend the rest of the daylight hours. He was eager to hear more about the destruction of the Pleasance, but Hari had suddenly fallen into a meditative mood, and while he munched his mangoes he stared straight before him, refusing to talk. It was not until they had once more got into their saddles that he disclosed what was in his mind. 'Listen, Jali!' he said, 'I have decided to go a few miles out of our way for the sake of — well, chiefly for the sake of picking up a little more information. We shall be taking a few risks, but great things are happening in the world, and to remain ignorant of them may be more dangerous than to do what I propose doing. Out there,' and he pointed vaguely to the north-west, 'there are some fugitives from the Pleasance of the Arts. They are in hiding. They escaped from prison during the fire. I can't bring myself to go by without trying to get in touch with them.'

Jali agreed with enthusiasm.

Soon they were passing through a deserted village, where sun-

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dried corpses lay in grotesque attitudes against the mud walls. Next came a stretch of fields so fiercely scorched by the sun as to be almost indistinguishable from the surrounding desert; but in front there now rose a line of craggy hills marked by deep clefts that promised shade and possibly water. The heat was intense, and weariness had laid hold of Jali, but there was a question in his mind that he could not keep back.

'Tell me,' he said, 'do you know what became of Gunevati in the fire? Did she escape?'

Hari gave him a quick look. 'No. She is dead.'

'How did she die?'

Hari hesitated for a fraction of a second, then said: 'I don't know.'

Jali felt certain that he was lying. An inner voice told him that Gunevati had been thrown to the mad elephant.

Saying no more, he dropped behind a little, and his thoughts wandered painfully among scenes of the past. While his body swayed wearily in the saddle, he struggled with problems which he knew he would never solve. Why should the fate of this girl, so unimportant in itself, so small in comparison with other events that were taking place every hour — why should it have been first heralded by what had seemed — to those who had perceived the portent — to be nothing less than a shivering of the fabric of the material world? But who could judge of importance? Was anything important except in relation to some mind? And did anyone know what was important in the mind of God? Perhaps the destiny of whole peoples, the rise and fall of nations and empires, was unimportant — was merely the mechanism by which some result, infinitesimally small in human eyes, was achieved. Perhaps the whole mechanism of generations and events was only the apparatus by which some value of which we had hardly any inkling was being brought into actuality.

The blazing sun was now causing the whole landscape to quiver and calling up mirages that retreated as one approached. Jali felt slightly light-headed, but the line of bluffs was now only two or three miles away. Presently Hari halted and said: 'From now on I want you to keep your eyes upon those rocks, and if you catch sight of any human creature there, tell me. We have to make it clear to these people that we are coming not as enemies to spy them out but as friends.'

Slowly and watchfully they approached the mouth of the gully



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in which each patch of shade made an inky darkness that might be concealing a man with a levelled gun. At first Jali was too excited to be nervous, but when the rocky walls, pitted with dark caves, had drawn close on either side, he felt as if he and Hari were walking into a trap. After a few minutes the latter came to a halt and turned round to give him a grin. 'I think I shall try the effect of giving a hail. My hope is that . . .'

The sentence remained unfinished; and Jali, following the direction of Hari's gaze, found himself staring at three scarecrow figures, who with guns in their hands had risen from behind a rock not twenty yards off. For about a minute silent looks were exchanged; then Hari called out something, the strain was relaxed, and the men on the rock moved towards them.

The words that passed were few, but sufficient to establish confidence; one of the men took charge of the horses, while the other two led the way up a boulder-strewn slope towards a sheer face of rock. A hidden cave, however, soon came into view, a welcome sight to Jali, who realized that at last he was going to get a good rest. But what about water? To his joy some was offered him before he had time even to ask for it. There were about a dozen men in the cave, all haggard and in rags. This much he noticed and no more; for, after drinking his fill, he stretched himself out on the sandy floor and fell asleep.

His first moments on returning to consciousness were full of confusion, and even on opening his eyes he did not immediately realize where he was. The sun, which was striking upon the opposite wall of the gully, filled the cave with a reflected glare. The air was cooler; it was late afternoon. Looking round, he saw that his companions were all asleep or trying to sleep. A great many of them were painfully restless, and there was a continual noise of coughing. On the faces of those who were turned towards him he observed marks of hardship, exhaustion, and nervous strain.

Fierce was the light upon the masses of pink, white, and yellow rock that towered up opposite. It was like looking into a furnace of glowing coals. What fear there must be in the minds of these hunted men, who were taking refuge in the inhuman wilderness because it was less dangerous to them than their own kind! No doubt they had narrowly escaped torture and death at the hands of Daniyai — a thought that re-awakened a great hatred of the Prince in his heart.

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Ever since his father's disablement he had indulged in day-dreams of revenge; and the knowledge that Hari nourished a hatred equal to his own made another link between them. He remembered the smile with which Hari had announced the destruction of the Pleasance of the Arts; but the next minute there rose before him a vision of the desert as it had appeared under the slowly-flushing sky. Revenge suddenly seemed petty and small. But, if hate was small, was not love also? And all the emotions, all the fevers, that kept men engaged in living? And if nothing was important, why then anything might be thought to be so; and hate came into its own again.

Peering into the dusk of the cave once more, he saw Hari's eyes fixed upon him, so he got up, and stepping carefully round the sprawling sleepers, squatted by Hari upon the sand, which here was so cool that it felt damp to his feet. Hari began talking in a low voice. 'Well? You have had a good sleep, and if you feel a bit stiff, you mustn't complain. Here are some raisins and figs and a small piece of goat.'

Jali took the food and ate it thankfully.

'Who is the chief here — the man you recognized and talked to when we first came?'

Hari eyed him with amusement. 'You ask who that is? — Well, look again! He is lying asleep there.'

A few yards off there lay, flat on his back, a thin, little man who, even in sleep, kept an air of dignified self-possession. His hands were folded upon his chest; his hair was well-brushed; and although his clothes were in tatters and he had a ten-days' beard on his chin, somehow he gave an impression of neatness. 'Don't you recognize your old friend?' said Hari.

Suddenly a light dawned. 'That's not Mabun Das?'

'Of course it is. The same Mabun who once entertained us so well in the Old Palace at Agra. Well! here he is — entertaining us again.'

Jali stared in a wondering silence.

'If you want to know what has brought him to this I will tell you; but you must keep it to yourself. — Like the good man that he is, Mabun has been secretly working against Daniyal for the last two years or more. Daniyal discovered this, lured him up to the Pleasance, and imprisoned him. That fire saved Mabun's life.'

There was excitement in Hari's voice, and he went on: 'Would you care to hear the story?'

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Jali nodded.

'Mabun has just been telling it me. It was like this: one evening after dark shouts went up from different parts of the Pleasance and in through the window of Mabun's cell there came a pungent smoke. He recognized the smell of burning reeds, and soon noticed its effect on eyes and throat, for it was not long before he could hardly see or breathe. At the same time the noise and confusion outside increased — also the glare in the sky. Clearly incendiaries had been at work; for the whole Pleasance was now in flames. The incendiaries must be his own agents, he thought, and at first he felt no concern for his own safety. But soon the roar and heat of the flames filled the air; and he began to think that he would be roasted alive. However, just as he was giving himself up for lost, an axe was swung at his door; in a few minutes it went down, and before him stood, not one of his own agents, but a fellow-prisoner who was risking his life to save him. Together the two rushed out, and they had the good sense to make straight for the water-front instead of trying to escape by land. They plunged into the lake, and, having swum out a little way, turned to look back at the fire. The scene was extraordinary. Not only was the whole Pleasance in flames but all the dry, reedy foreshore of the lake; and from this huge smouldering expanse there went up heavy volumes of smoke. It was the smoke that caused so large a loss of life, for the people, blinded and half suffocated, ran about in helpless confusion. They were like maddened cattle, they . . .'

At this point Hari broke off, for Mabun Das had woken up and was looking round with the evident intention of joining them. After shaking the sand from his clothes and smoothing his hair, he strolled up, a polite smile upon his face. His greetings to Jali were amiable but brief; they contained no reference to anything unusual in the conditions of their meeting; and then, turning to Hari, he said in a business-like tone: 'I've been thinking about what you told me just now. I should certainly go and have a talk with Akbar, if I were you; and I should go while my wound was still worth displaying. It has occurred to me, too, that as he is planning to make a pilgrimage on foot to what is known as the Sacred Well (you know the place; it's only a few miles from Daulatpur), your best plan would be to catch him there. The conditions are likely to be favourable. A scene of magnanimous forgiveness would be quite in keeping with the occasion. You see what I mean?'

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'Yes. I think your advice is good.' Hari stared at Mabun thoughtfully. 'This pilgrimage of Akbar's comes at a fortunate moment for me. We will make straight for Daulatpur, and I expect Bhoj will be ready to take us in.'

He fell into thought again, then went on: 'I wish I had equally useful advice to offer you, but all I can do is to give you my map. You will certainly need one.'

'Thank you. Please pass it to me without letting anyone see. I don't trust these men. Most of them, I expect, are going to become bandits. If they knew who I was they would kill me at once. In all probability, too, a price has been set on my head. The situation is very absurd.'

'Very!' said Hari, laughing.

'I shall try to slip away by myself to-night. With any luck I shall make contact with one of Salim's bands, and once established at the Prince's headquarters, I shall at least be safe.'

Hari nodded, and for a minute there was a silence; then: 'Tell me!' he said, 'have you really no idea who was responsible for the burning down of the Pleasance?'

'None. That affair is a complete mystery.'

From this they went on to talk politics, and Jali's attention wandered. Something had just happened that filled him with curiosity. When Mabun had said: 'The affair is a mystery,' Hari, behind the other's back, had given him a grin and a wink.

The journey was resumed at nightfall with a guide provided by Mabun. It was hard going in the gorge, which was dark, but as they reached its head the moon rose, and they found themselves on a wide plain covered with white rocks. Some of these were shaped like dragons, others rose in miniature spires that gleamed against the sky. It was a limestone country, bare but for thin shrubs and a scattering of small, dark trees.

After parting with their guide, who turned back as soon as the plain was reached, they rode for six hours without a halt. During these hours vague, dreamy thoughts floated through Jali's mind; his fatigue was great, but it did not affect him unpleasantly. Hari, on the other hand, was out of sorts and he grumbled about his wounded arm which had begun to hurt him. Dawn was still a long way off when it became evident that they had taken the wrong road. For some time they cast about, trying first this track then that. At last,

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Hari flung himself from his horse, saying that he would go not a step farther that night; and Jali welcomed this decision. Not many minutes later he was asleep in the lee of a large rock that kept off the keen night wind.

It was broad daylight when he woke. Beside him sat Hari staring moodily out over the sunny wilderness. To his consternation Hari was now looking very ill, and presently as he was helping him to change the bandage on his arm, the sight of the wound filled him with fresh dismay, for it was greatly discoloured.

After dawdling about in the shadow of the rock for about an hour Hari suddenly became full of energy. 'We'll start at once,' he said, 'and we won't take another rest until we get to Daulatpur. Our horses are fresh; it can't be more than another fifty miles. Come along!'

Jali had seen him putting some opium pills into his mouth, and felt sure that he was slightly drugged. It troubled him to think of Hari riding along in the full glare of the mid-day sun, to say nothing of the possibility of meeting enemies; on the other hand, the sooner they got to their destination — or, indeed, to any inhabited region — the better.

The ride continued during the whole of that day. Occasionally they would get off their horses, take a draught of water, and stretch their limbs, but these rests were brief, for they were aware that although their general direction was right, they had gone very considerably out of their way. As the long hours went by Jali fell into a stupor, but the sinking of the sun brought no small relief. He might actually have enjoyed this sleepy progress across the wilderness under the brightening moon had it not been for his anxiety about Hari.

Shortly before midnight he noticed that the character of the country was changing, for ahead there were signs of cultivation. The huts of peasants became visible here and there in the midst of fields of green crops, and presently they came upon a group of men squatting by the wayside. In answer to their questions a grey-beard rose slowly to his feet and pointed to the east.

'And how long will it take?'

'Your pace is not fast,' was the reply, 'but in about an hour you will be there.'

The dream-like journey continued. A smell of green and growing things rose on the cool, damp air. Smoke-wreaths, where field-

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rubbish was being burnt, hung white under the moon, and as her light grew stronger mile upon mile of level field stretched out calm under the night sky.

In less than an hour they came to the edge of a little cliff not more than thirty feet in height, and found themselves looking down on to a plot of grass with some thin willow-trees behind it. In the centre stood a big, deep water-trough of stone that was brimming silently over into the rich grasses underneath. A few yards away, on the other side of the hollow, there was a small building with a flat roof. It reminded Jali of some pictures of Greek temples that his mother had once shown him. This, he felt sure, was the Gurú's house; and there was the Sacred Well — which was no well at all but a gushing spring.

As Hari and he were gazing down into this little shell of quiet a thin, silvery tinkle came to their ears. It was an unexpected sound — the tinkle of glass clinking softly as in a wind. Only there was no breath of wind, nor could Jali make out exactly where the fitful sound came from. It drifted up out of the dell so tenuously that to catch it was like snatching at gossamer threads. One's instinct was to connect it in some way with the brimming water, for that was the only thing in all the scene that had movement. A small hillock of water welled up at one end of the trough, sending not ripples but a constant quavering along the whole bright surface. Everywhere the water silently brimmed over, clinging to the broad, rounded edge and the mossy sides. This ceaseless movement caught the eye, but between that full and soft fluidity and the thinness of the tiny sound that seemed too frail to ride even upon the air there was no reasonable link, and Jali, dreamy with fatigue, was tantalized as in a dream.

Presently, however, his eyes, wandering here and there, were arrested by a faint coruscation, a minute flashing of lunar tints just over the roof of the house and under the arm of a willow that leaned across the corner. There, beside some slivers of glass that hung down from the tree, a silver-grey monkey was sitting in an attitude of reflection. After a moment it raised its hand and produced again the moony sparks and the glassy tinkle. Its gesture was an undecided one, and to Jali's fancy the monkey had a discouraged air. The newcomers were of no interest to it. Occasionally turning its small wizened face up to the sky, it snatched at a passing moth.

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Hari stirred at last. With a groan he dismounted, and in the same movement sank heavily to the ground. Springing from his saddle, Jali was by his side in an instant, and on finding that he was unconscious, ran along the edge of the cliff and gave a call for help. At once a little old man stepped out of the house, looked up, and came swiftly towards him.

HARI was never able to remember how he got down the cliff into the Guru's dell, nor was it until four days later that he returned to a consciousness of his surroundings. He awoke to find himself lying in bed in a small whitewashed room. Sunlight streamed in through the window and the open door, and there blew about him a pleasant air smelling of grass and flowers. For a few minutes he remained awake, then his mind wandered off into dream again.

It seemed to him that he was walking along by the lake in the Royal Hunting Grounds at Agra and that the frogs were jumping up from under his feet. They leapt out of the long, damp grass into the water; and the curious thing was that from the broken surface of the water there came a gentle tinkling sound.

That tinkling by its persistence eventually brought him back to reality. He opened his eyes and remembered the monkey and the little bits of sparkling glass that it had played with. Faintly he called out: 'Guru!'

The voice that replied had become familiar to him in his feverish dreams. 'Yes, Hari Khan,' it said.

'I wanted to know if you were there.'

'I am here.'

Hari was silent for a while, then he asked: 'Where is Jali?'

'He is in the Palace at Daulatpur — the guest of Rajah Bhoj. He has ridden over several times to see you.'

'Has he written to his mother yet?'

'Yes. A messenger went off this morning.'

'I hope he didn't say I was likely to die.'

'Certainly not!' The Guru gave a little laugh. 'Besides, I don't think you will die.'

Hari smiled again. The Guru had a pleasant voice; it was kindly, matter-of-fact, and more often than not expressive of a gentle amusement. 'After all, what does it really matter?' he seemed to imply, and one felt that it didn't matter — not because nothing mattered, but because what did matter was elsewhere and secure.

Although it hurt him to move, Hari turned on his bed and took a look at his host whom as yet he had hardly seen at all. The Guru was sitting cross-legged on a mat and had writing-things beside him.



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His dress was a white dhoti that left his arms free. He looked strong and wiry; he had an air both of alertness and of repose.

As soon as he saw that Hari's eyes were open, he got up and came to the bed. 'You are better,' he said.

Hari drank from the cup that was being held out to him, then lay back with a sigh. He felt very uncertain whether he would live, but for the moment relief from pain was enough. Besides, the Guru's eyes — by their extraordinary candour and the light of affection behind them — comforted him.

After a moment he said: 'I'm sleepy. I think I shall go off again.' In his heart he was thinking: 'This is a good man; I feel as if I had known him for years.'

'Yes,' said the Guru. 'Go to sleep!' And he went back to his corner.

For some time there was complete silence in the room; then, taking care to make no noise, the Guru got up and went again to the bed. Hari was asleep, but his breathing was rapid and his cheeks flushed. The Guru looked at him long and closely; when he came away it was to stand in the doorway staring before him with sadness.

But Hari did not die. Four weeks later he was well enough to totter out of the house to a couch in the shade of the willow-tree. He was now suffering from nothing worse than extreme weakness; but this sensation, of which he had no previous experience, was most disagreeable to him. The change, too, from his room to the open air proved a great disappointment. The strong light, the sun's heat, even the mild breeze — all caused him discomfort. But he was determined not to let this be seen; and his efforts to dissemble increased his secret ill-humour.

The Guru had brought out his writing-things, and was seated on a mat not far from Hari's couch. Although his companion was making no demands upon him, Hari wished he were not there. That kindly presence gave him no more pleasure than did the peace of the dell, or the thought of his own escape from death. Nothing pleased him; nothing, he thought, would ever please him again.

Dissembling his true feelings, he began to say agreeable things to the Guru, to thank him for his kindnesses, to praise the beauty of the dell, and to say how much he was enjoying being in the open air again. Then he asked for the latest news of Jali.

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The Guru looked up. 'I got a hastily-scribbled note from him yesterday. He told me he was just off with Prince Mohan to their country-place up in the hills. It was a pity you couldn't see him the last time he was here, but that happened to be a rather bad day for you.'

'Yes. But it was the last of my bad days. And in another week I shall be well.'

Hari spoke confidently as if he were looking forward to his return to normal life, but actually he was dreading it. It gave him no pleasure to look at his life — neither his past, nor his present, and least of all his future.

In order to distract himself from these thoughts, he went on: 'Akbar, I suppose, has given up that idea of paying you a visit? At one time I had a notion that if he came to Daulatpur I might ask for an audience. You see . . .' a yawn interrupted his speech. 'I have a bone to pick with him. I daresay Jali has told you something about it.'

The Guru gave him an amused smile. 'The Emperor has come and gone. He was here about a fortnight ago when you were at the height of your fever.'

'Come and gone!'

The Guru nodded.

'And did he actually visit you here — in this dell?'

'He did.'

'Well!' Hari paused from sheer astonishment. 'Do tell me about it.'

Still smiling, the Guru laid down his quill. 'Oh, everything went off quite well, I think. Akbar, you know, was by way of walking here barefoot from Agra; and I believe he really did cover a' good deal of the distance in that fashion. The last mile I saw him do with my own eyes. I had gone out to meet him, for his equerries had been here the day before to tell me that that was what I ought to do. I found that the road had been prepared — all the stones removed, and a little sand put down in the rough places. I arrived at his encampment early in the morning, but he didn't keep me waiting long. He came out of his tent, big, burly, vigorous — but changed. It was some years since I had last seen him. Everyone now seems to be expecting him to die. Perhaps that is because *he* feels sure that his days are numbered.'

After a silence Hari said: 'You were expecting me to die, weren't you?'

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'The doctor said you would. But I soon doubted it.'

'Why?'

'Well, for one thing, in your delirium you never went very far back. You never went back to your childhood: you talked about comparatively recent things. But to return to Akbar: he gave me a very pleasant greeting and then we walked along the road together under the hot sun. He didn't walk easily for all his apparent vigour: he perspired a great deal; but he talked without ceasing. He remembered every detail of his visit here twenty-six years ago when he was giving thanks for the birth of Salim. When we came to the cliff I felt very uneasy lest he should slip and fall; those were anxious moments for everybody; but he got down without mishap. Then he went up to the royal carpet that had been spread beside the well (it is always called a well: I don't know why) and knelt down in the Christian posture and prayed silently. At this point, for some reason, I felt much moved, and I noticed that all present — we were about a dozen there — were moved equally. It was a curious little scene; I'm sorry you missed it.'

'Yes,' said Hari meditatively. 'And to think that I was in your house all the time — not twenty yards off!'

The Guru laughed gently. 'You were on my mind every moment, for not only were you very ill but I was afraid you might create some disturbance. However, I had given you a big dose of opium that morning — just as much as I dared — in order to keep you quiet.'

After a pause Hari said: 'Did I ever talk about Akbar in my fever?'

'Indeed you did! And not very politely.'

Hari smiled. 'Well, what happened next?'

'After finishing his prayers, he got up and drank some water from the well. I was hoping that he would take his leave without setting foot in the house. But no! He stood looking about him — his eyes sharp and inquisitive; and presently he was asking me questions about my daily life. Finally, he strode up to the house and went in.'

'And saw me lying there?'

'Yes. And he recognized you at once. "Hullo!" he exclaimed. "What is this fellow doing here? Is he ill?" — I replied that you were very ill, and added that it was from a wound received whilst fighting for him against a band of Salim's horsemen. He listened attentively, asked me a good many questions — most of which I

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couldn't answer — and then said: "Then he's a better man than I thought. If he recovers, let him come to me and I'll look into his case again. Kings should be no less merciful than God himself".'

'Dear me!' exclaimed Hari, who was now sitting up. 'All this is most amusing! And what's more, it looks as if matters were turning out rather well for me.' He gave his host a secret, smiling look. 'As for that fight of mine, you got your information from Jali, I suppose?'

'Yes.' And then, as Hari said no more, he went on: 'While the Emperor stood there looking at you, I prayed devoutly that his great booming voice would not wake you. Had you woken, you would very likely have kicked him in the stomach, as you did me only a few hours later.'

'My dear Guru! What am I to say!'

'In my case, it didn't matter; I am so light, I fluttered back like a dry leaf; but Akbar has weight, and his stomach is large and soft.'

Hari laughed. 'Well, now I'll tell you what I haven't told anyone else: I fought not *for* Akbar but *against* him.' And he described his part in the affray.

It gave him a certain satisfaction to do this, and he watched his companion's face closely as he was speaking. The Guru listened with a faint smile, then said: 'Well, it all seems to have turned out very well for you. But you can hardly hope to have such luck again.'

Hari laughed, and when he next spoke his tone was dry. 'I have a question to ask. During my long delirium I must have babbled a good deal about my private life. Isn't that so?'

'Yes. There were some days when you talked all the time. Sometimes you thought you were talking to Raneé Sita, sometimes to Gokal or Jali, and once or twice you got very excited, thinking that I was Prince Daniyal. Without doubt you have told me a good deal about yourself without meaning to. But does that matter, Hari Khan?'

Hari smiled coldly. 'No.'

On this there was a silence, and presently he lay back and closed his eyes. The Guru went on with his writing.

When next Hari opened his eyes the sun was low and he realized that he had been asleep. A red light struck upon the cliff opposite; the hollow was filled with a gentle, rosy light,

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After a minute he heard the Guru say to him: 'Was it the monkey that woke you?'

'No. I hear him without hearing him. His music fits itself into my dreams.'

For a while he lay quiet, then he went on: 'It would be stupid of me to mind having revealed myself to a man like you. I don't mind.'

'I'm glad of that.' The Guru smiled. 'You are looking much better since your sleep. At last I feel you to be convalescent.'

'In some ways,' said Hari meditatively, 'you must know me better than I know myself, because when one talks in delirium buried parts of oneself come to the surface.'

The other nodded: 'That may be.'

'Guru,' said Hari suddenly. 'I have not the faintest idea what to do with myself. My life is complete confusion.'

The Guru pushed his papers away from him and looked up into the sky. 'Don't be in a hurry, Hari Khan! This is the first day for a long time that you have not been a very sick man.'

Hari sighed, then raised himself on one elbow. 'Is there any news that you are keeping from me? I am well enough to hear anything.'

'No. I am hiding nothing. But, as it happens, while you were asleep a messenger brought this letter. I asked the man if he came from Ranees Sita, and I should have woken you if he had said yes. But he was from Princess Lalita, so I let you sleep on.'

Hari laughed, for there was a certain humour in the way these last words were spoken. Taking the letter which his companion was holding out to him, he turned it over and over without opening it. The Guru collected his papers. 'I am going to leave you, Hari Khan. This is the time for my evening prayers.'

THE next day at the same hour Hari moved again to his couch under the window. As soon as he was settled he turned to the Guru with a smile and said: 'In one way and another you've heard a good deal about me. Wouldn't it be only fair if you were now to tell me something about yourself?'

'Certainly!' The Guru laughed. 'What kind of thing do you want to know?'

'You seem to have reached a greater simplicity and honesty than most men. How have you done it?'

'Hari Khan, my life has been — and still is — like the peeling of an onion. One skin after another of self-deception and pretence do I strip off. In the process my eyes water and my vanity smarts.'

'I should have thought you had got pretty near to an honest core. I respect you for not having a great following, or being the head of an Ashram.'

The Guru chuckled, at the same time shaking his head. 'Alas, I must confess that there was a time when I was quite famous. You are not old enough to remember it, but people used to come from all over India to see me. The sick were cured by my touch; the devout licked up the dust where I had placed my foot. You would not think it to look at me now, would you?'

'Never mind!' replied Hari, with a smile. 'Hasn't the Emperor just honoured you with a visit! Who knows if your fame will not return? But please tell me more!'

'There is little to tell. I was brought up to be a priest like my father. We lived in a small village near Mangalore. When my parents died I wandered about India, and, having learned doctoring, I tended the sick. As soon as I came to this place I felt I should like to live here; and a wealthy merchant whom I had tended built this house for me and spread my name abroad. He was one of those men who love to talk and have the gift of making everything sound wonderful. When this hollow had been cleared of brushwood — for at that time it was a thicket — that trough with the bubbling water came into the light; and at once the merchant spread the story about that this was the well of a great saint who had lived here hundreds of years ago. And before long it was said that I was a

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reincarnation of him. From that moment I was a saint, no matter what I declared to the contrary. And it so happened that in this year Prince Salim was born, and the Emperor, wishing to make a public demonstration of piety, chose to make a pilgrimage here. This place is about the right distance from Agra — a distance that he could cover on foot without too much trouble. So he came: and with that my reputation as a holy man was firmly established.'

Hari gave a little laugh. 'Well, anyhow, you were not responsible.'

'I'm not sure! There is a saying: Reputations, illnesses, and wives only come to those who want them. For a time I certainly did enjoy my reputation. But only for a time. Gradually uneasiness gathered within me. Never had I deliberately aimed at this thing, but I couldn't help feeling that there must be something in me that lent itself to the making of it. This is a difficult matter. I don't want you to think that I am casting any aspersions, by implication, upon other holy men. There are many famous ones no doubt who have no need to feel as I did. All I can do is to speak for myself. I was uneasy; but for a long time even my uneasiness was insincere. I enjoyed denying my saintliness because I saw that that only increased my reputation for humility. But' — and here the Guru smiled — 'of course it was not really difficult for me to fall back into the place that I deserved. All that I had to do was to give up posing. As soon as I did that, my reputation began to go down. . . .'

'Posing?' exclaimed Hari.

'Yes. I'm afraid that is the word. As I learnt to give up my instinctive posing, the world lost interest in me. I was still able to do good; but not as a famous man — only as an ordinary man — and only in a more laborious and commonplace way.'

Hari smiled. 'You were no longer able to work miracles? To cure people?'

'No. At least I could do nothing striking.'

Hari gave a laugh in which his companion joined.

'But,' the Guru went on, 'let me say again that I am not insinuating anything against miracle-workers or against the faith of the people who believe in them. There are different levels of self-understanding, and each level has its own sincerity. As for me I had to think of my own particular sincerity. I had no right to work miracles, and it was bad for me.'

'I am not sure that I understand you,' returned Hari, 'but . . .'

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he hesitated, 'but I am sure of this: the ordinary man, when he is not acting the mountebank himself, is admiring someone who is.'

The Guru smiled and said nothing. There was a silence during which he stared thoughtfully at the cliff. A sudden change had come over Hari, who now raised himself on one elbow and looked at the Guru through narrowed eyes. At last he said:

'I need advice. I want to ask you what I had better do.'

'You must stay here for the present.'

'Yes, but . . .'

'Was there something in Princess Lalita's letter . . .?'

'Oh, that has no importance. Don't let that letter — or anything that I may have said in my ravings — set your mind on the wrong track.'

The Guru shook his head. 'No, I am not making any mistake about the nature of your present feelings for her — as compared with your feelings for Ranees Sita. If there is a conflict in your nature it goes much deeper than that.'

Hari pondered. 'My love for Sita is real — if anything in me is real. Perhaps I need say no more about Lalita. It is a long story, and it leads nowhere.'

The Guru hesitated, then replied: 'I think you would do well not to pick and choose, but to tell me all you can.'

'Very well. I once had an inconclusive love-affair with Lalita. It came to an end — oh, quite a long time ago. Since then I have seen her only once. I will tell you about that presently.' He paused and passed his hand over his forehead. 'But we have occasionally exchanged letters, and I now see that this was unwise, not because they were love-letters but because they did reveal considerable intimacy in the past. I am no longer in love with her, nor she with me, although — until recently — she liked to think so. She imagined it because — well, because she is romantic, and because she has a profound hatred of Daniyal. She knows, too, that I share that hatred; the truth is that we have a great deal in common.'

He paused again; and, after the Guru had given a nod, went on: 'There is nothing more to tell until I come to my brief stay in Kathiapur about three months ago. It was there that I learnt for the first time from my sister-in-law, Srilata, that my wife had divorced me, that my principality had been handed over to her lover, and that I was under sentence of banishment. But without that I had troubles enough. You see . . .'



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Quickly the Guru said: 'You needn't explain. Your ravings have told me quite clearly what you feel about Rajah Amar.'

'Well! Srilata is a good friend of mine, and one of the few people who know about me and Lalita; and in the course of our conversation she asked me whether Lalita and I had been writing to one another. I was obliged to admit that we had; upon which she pointed out that if any of our letters were to fall into Daniyal's hands he would use them to make such a scandal as would enable him to cry off from his marriage to Lalita. When I left her that evening it was with a pretty strong suspicion that one or more of my letters had *already* fallen into dangerous hands, and that Srilata knew it. Nor was it difficult to guess into *whose* hands; for Lalita and her sisters had been for some weeks under the chaperonage of Ambissa — my wife. So on leaving Srilata — it was then nearly midnight and pitch dark — I made my way to the house where Ambissa had been staying. My idea was to make a search of that house. I knew she had packed up and left in a hurry because the arrival of our party had been unexpected. I had a vague hope that I might find *something*. The house, which stands in a park, was dark and appeared to be quite empty. I got into it — without any difficulty — by one of the windows; and then struck a light. There was a lamp on the table, which I lit, and I saw at once that I was in the right house, for the room was full of Ambissa's clothes. I went into the next room and began making a search for papers, but nothing of interest did I find. I was still searching when I heard a light rustle and looking over my shoulder saw Lalita peeping in through the door. When she saw who it was she gave a scream of delight, ran up, and threw herself into my arms. We were both very excited and pleased at seeing one another. We laughed a great deal. She asked me what I was doing there, and I explained. Then she admitted having "lost" one — or possibly two — of my letters; but for the moment we were not in the mood to give much thought to that.' Here Hari looked into the Guru's face smilingly. 'I must be careful,' he went on, 'not to give you a false impression of Lalita. You must understand that she has a fine and honest nature, although in some ways, I suppose, unprincipled — and inclined to recklessness. You must remember, too, what a dreadful position she is in, being confronted with a marriage which she hates. On that evening she was in a reckless mood; she had recently had an odious letter from Daniyal. She was longing to make off, to disappear into the

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wilderness — Turkestan, Mongolia, anywhere — and start a new life.'

'And she suggested that you should go with her?'

'Yes. She told me that she knew how matters stood between me and Sita, but that that made no difference. I was banished, and Sita could not follow me. Well then! I, too, had better make a fresh start.' Hari laughed and shrugged. 'I wish I could give you an idea of her directness, simplicity, and charm. "Come," she said, "we'll fly right up into the mountains together. We'll make our way along, hunting and fishing, and living like real outlaws. I have lived that life; I know what I'm talking about. Don't you see, it's what we are intended for? My old fortune-teller saw this pictured long ago. She saw you and me living in a tent with drifts of snow round about us.'"

Here Hari broke off, then said suddenly: 'Perhaps you are wondering why I think it worth while to tell you all this? The reason is that you ought to make no mistake as to how I stand with Lalita. Besides, I shouldn't be surprised if she did something . . .'

He broke off again, and in the ensuing silence the Guru said: 'Had you yet had an opportunity of discussing your banishment — in fact, your whole situation — with Ranee Sita?'

'No. I didn't do that — at least, not with any thoroughness — until after we had left Kathiapur — two days later. As for Lalita, of course I completely rejected her proposals. I told her outright that I loved Sita far too much to do as she asked. I said, too, that it was now much too late for her to refuse to marry Daniyal. The matter had gone too far, and too much hung on it. And it was on that note that we parted. Ever since that night, however, I have felt afraid that she might do something wild; and now . . .'

Stopping abruptly, Hari leaned forward and gave a strange smile. 'Guru!' His tone was curt. 'I can't help myself; I am going to tell you more than I meant. When I said that Lalita's letter contained nothing of importance, I lied. Her letter shows her to be in great difficulties; and — and I want to help her.'

The other remained silent, and after a minute Hari went on: 'I suppose you have heard that Daniyal's Pleasance has been burnt to the ground?'

'Yes.'

'Well! The credit for that belongs to Lalita. Did I talk about it in my delirium?'

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‘A little. But not comprehensibly.’

Hari frowned, then said: ‘The trouble is that Daniyal is now beginning to suspect her of having had a hand in the burning. I feel that I ought to do anything that I can to help her. What she wants to do is to run away — for good.’

‘With you?’

Hari gave a laugh. ‘No! Not with me; with someone else! Don’t smile, Guru! I want Lalita to have your sympathy. She is in a very dangerous situation. But, if she can get away with this young man who wants to marry her, no doubt all will be well.’

And she asks you to help her to get away?’

‘Yes.’

‘But — you have Sita to think of.’

‘Of course.’

The Guru looked into Hari’s face and gave a gentle smile. ‘I don’t think you ought to let Princess Lalita’s affairs take a very large place in your life just now. You have other — and more direct — responsibilities.’

Hari raised his eyebrows. ‘Are you suggesting that I should just wash my hands of her?’

‘I don’t know what she wants of you. But I think you should beware of running away from large responsibilities by making too much of smaller ones.’ And when Hari gave him a look of annoyance, he added: ‘You must remember that when you said to me yesterday “My life is in complete confusion!” Princess Lalita’s letter had not yet arrived.’

A silence followed these words. Hari maintained his steady, hostile stare, and the Guru met it unflinchingly. At last Hari opened his mouth to reply, but at that moment the Guru’s servant came up.

‘Yes, Mahabir?’

‘Mahatma, the men of Kedinar are calling for you. There is trouble in the village.’

‘Is it urgent?’

‘Mahatma, it is.’

The Guru rose to his feet. ‘Forgive me, Hari Khan. I must go.’

THERE was no more conversation between Hari and the Guru that day. In the afternoon Mahabir explained that his master would be unable to return until late. There was much unrest among the villagers, he said, and that kept his master very busy.

‘Why unrest? There is no famine here.’

‘No, but the Emperor’s new taxes are unjust. The peasants are saying, “Why should we work when everything is taken away from us? And yet, if we don’t work, we starve”.’

‘And what does your master do?’

‘He explains to the peasants what they don’t understand, and prevents the tax-collectors from robbing them. He pleads with the tax-collectors and with Rajah Bhoj on their behalf. He gives medicine to the sick; he mends the people’s quarrels.’

Hari smiled. ‘And when people are fools he tells them so.’

Mahabir gave a laugh. ‘My Lord, when a man is really a fool that does no good.’

That evening Hari lay on his bed for a long time fully dressed. The atmosphere was heavy, he felt weary, and as he watched the flies at play in the air above his head, he said to himself that in the heavy atmosphere of his mind his thoughts were as aimless as they. At last with a groan he got up and went to the open door. The sun had just set, and a light cloud dimmed the moon. Moon and stars were shining softly down into the dell. The grass was grey, the deep, brimming trough of water stood out dark, except along one edge where the moonlight caught it. The scene was inexplicably familiar — perhaps, he thought, because the Guru, who had lived in this place for some thirty years, had looked upon it so often. Might it not have acquired some quality . . . ?

Throwing a cloak over his shoulders, he walked over the grass to the trough and leaned with bare arms upon the brimming edge. But the water, broken in its smooth running, now made a restless sound, so he moved to the other side of the trough, where the rim was higher and the water did not overflow. The house with the willow beside it now stood before him. Stars were shining brightly through the tree’s delicate foliage, which did no more than make a thin lattice against the sky. He smiled, thinking what pleasure Sita

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would have taken in this scene which matched so well the goodness of the man who lived here.

His sense of Sita's personality grew stronger every minute, and at last he perceived with astonishment that he had never properly apprehended her until now. Up till this moment selfish desires had clouded his vision; he had never been sufficiently detached to see her in her essence — to see her, that is to say, by the light of the imagination. What he now saw was her personal spirit, unfolding its eternal uniqueness — as it were, a lily, shooting up out of the dark morass of inchoate being, expanding leaf and bud and flower.

Looking into the past he saw her as a child in her home in the Caucasus, apple-cheeked and gay; next, as a slender young girl with gravity and romance in her eyes; then as a bride. That far-away courtship in her parents' house, the wedding, the long, slow journey through Persia, and all her life in India down to *this* — he looked at it as one looks at a cloud changing before one's eyes.

Very soon after returning to his room he fell asleep, but in a while he grew feverish, and his dreams took him back to the castle, the air of which he smelt once more — that parched air full of the smell of things bleached, baked, and desiccated by the sun. Some danger threatened, something was expected of him. Sita was waiting . . . But he did nothing, some obscure force holding him back; he was evasive and secretly ashamed.

In the morning on waking he tried to remember more, but the substance of his dreams eluded him. A little earlier than usual the Guru came in, and they had scarcely exchanged half a dozen words before a sudden fear clutched at his heart, and he cried out: 'You have some news for me! I can see it in your face — bad news!'

'Surprising, but not bad.' The Guru laid a hand on his shoulder. 'While I was in the Palace last night a messenger arrived from Raneé Sita. The man had been robbed of the letter she had given him, but he made a report by word of mouth. Amar has gone away. He left the castle at night — by himself. He has joined a passing band of pilgrims, and is now on his way to Ceylon.'

Hari stood stock still, staring before him. 'He has left her? She is alone?'

'Yes, he has left her. But she is bearing the stroke well.'

'I must go to her,' Hari said in a muffled voice.

The Guru looked at him in silence.

In a minute Hari said again: 'I must go to her — at once.'

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The other shook his head. 'I'm afraid that is impossible. The messenger got through Salim's lines only with the greatest difficulty; and he doubts whether he will manage to get back. You in your present condition would certainly fail. You will have to wait. In the meantime you have the knowledge that Sita is safe. She will come to no harm in Salim's hands.'

'Where is the messenger?'

'He is on his way to Jali, who, as you know, is now staying with Prince Mohan.'

Hari sat down on his bed and stared at the floor. 'As soon as I am well enough I will go to her.'

Late that afternoon, as he was lying under the willow, Hari looked up to see the Guru coming down the cliff.

'Have you been to Daulatpur again?' he called out.

'Yes. But there is no more news.'

'You look tired.'

The Guru sighed. 'There are many sad things happening in the world, Hari Khan.'

'And I lie here, knowing nothing, doing nothing.'

'But thinking. I looked down from the top of the cliff, and you were deep in thought.'

With these words he turned and went into the house. Hari, who had noticed that he was covered with dust and sweat, looked after him wonderingly. 'It is his hour for prayer,' he reflected.

An hour later the Guru came back, but a strong disinclination to talk about himself had come over Hari. He regretted his recent confidences, and was determined to keep the talk on impersonal subjects.

'Tell me,' he said, as soon as the Guru had spread his mat, 'what is your opinion of Akbar? How far do you consider him responsible for "the sad things that are happening in the world"?''

Thus invited, the Guru began to express his views, but Hari's attention wandered. With irritation he realized that his physical weakness had accentuated his natural inability to keep his mind for any length of time upon any one subject.

Quite suddenly he interrupted, saying: 'As for me, I can't think about Akbar without disgust. He poses as a protector of the poor, but everything he does makes their condition worse. He pretends to be a seeker after God, and in the end he has deified himself.'

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That pilgrimage of his to your sacred well — what hypocritical mummerly it was!’ There was a hot light in his eyes; and the Guru, looking up at the sky, said consideringly:

‘I don’t think Akbar is a conscious hypocrite.’

Hari raised himself upon one elbow. ‘What do you suppose Akbar said in his prayers? If I were God that old man’s prayers would disgust me.’

‘I think . . .’

Hari interrupted him. ‘What Akbar should have said is this: “God, if my will is not yours, destroy me. But presumably my will is yours, for otherwise I should not be the successful monster that I am. Accordingly, I thank you for making me vain, boastful, treacherous and cruel. Help me, I beseech you, to continue on my present path to the furtherance of my vulgar glory.”’

The Guru laughed gently. ‘You are asking of Akbar a good deal — a much greater capacity for self-criticism than we most of us possess. And in so far as we are all incompletely self-aware we are all unconscious hypocrites.’

‘Akbar is crude. One must be crude to be strong.’

‘That depends on what you mean by strong.’

‘Isn’t Akbar strong?’

The Guru shook his head smilingly. ‘He knows how to acquire power, but not how to use it. And even his power over others is of a very unsatisfactory kind. Consider how completely he has failed to establish his New Religion! Consider how he has failed with his sons! And, indeed, with himself.’

For a minute Hari remained silent, then, after visible hesitation, he said: ‘Sita would not agree with you about Akbar. She sees him as intensely religious-minded. She believes that he is moving towards Christianity and that he may yet carry India along with him.’

The Guru said quickly: ‘So you have discussed these things with her? I’m glad.’

Hari hesitated again. ‘Not much. The trouble is that behind Akbar I see Daniyal, and Daniyal in my opinion . . .’

‘Yes? What does Daniyal stand for in your mind?’

‘He stands for corruption — just as Akbar stands for a more unconscious wickedness.’

‘Have you explained all this to Sita?’

Hari shrugged. ‘No.’

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'I wonder why not.'

'She is no philosopher — nor for that matter am I.'

'But it seems to me that you are, Hari Khan. I mean you attempt to explain the world to yourself. You have ideas about Akbar and Daniyal — and about Ranee Sita herself. Ideas of good and evil, right and wrong, sin and retribution, are deeply woven into the texture of your thought.'

'That may be. But I am against introspection. It does no good to the ordinary man. And Sita hates it as much as I.'

'But it is no use going a little way and then stopping on the plea that one is no philosopher. What happens is merely that one goes over the same ground again and again. Am I wrong?'

Hari was silent.

'The background of your mind is crowded with mythological figures — I mean vague and perhaps misleading generalizations, some of which you press into use as self-justifications, while others haunt you accusingly.'

'I have an uneasy conscience, if that is what you mean.'

'Why don't you talk about all this to Sita?'

Hari was silent for a while, then he said: 'Sita is all of a piece. I admire her.'

'Nevertheless you pay her a poor compliment by not taking her into your confidence.'

'There is very little that she doesn't know about my life.'

'I am talking about what goes on in your mind. You are troubled by doubts and difficulties. Have you described them to Sita?'

'No.'

'I am sure that you should.'

'Somehow or other that would offend my taste,' said Hari after a long pause.

'I am not sure that one ought always to defer to one's taste. Besides, couldn't you say more accurately: "That would go against the grain"? And why not go against the grain?'

'I have no right to force Sita to share my responsibility in making certain decisions.'

'But surely the decisions you have in mind vitally concern her? Besides, you and she have already discussed your position and your plans — only you have withheld the really important parts of your thoughts and feelings. You have done this either to spare her feelings, or to spare your own pride.'



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'Ought I not to spare her feelings?'

'Hari Khan, there is something disingenuous in that. She loves you. Do you think that she would fail to understand you?'

'I do.'

'But have you any justification for thinking that? Surely you have no right to assume that she will be incapable of a sympathetic understanding?'

Hari was silent.

The Guru sighed, and went on: 'It seems to me that half the trouble that arises between human beings is caused by lack of candour. A man imagines that he is the other's superior — not in intelligence, not in fineness of feeling, not in anything that he can name — and yet in *something* which makes it his right, or even his duty, to treat the other as less than his equal. He assumes responsibilities that he ought to share, he makes concealments, he will not ask of the other what he asks of himself, or apply to the other the same standards. The man who says to himself that the other wouldn't understand, or couldn't bear to face the truth, or would be made too angry by it, is really being protective not of the other but of himself.' Here the Guru paused, then added with great earnestness, 'I should be untrue to the very principles which I am preaching, if I were to speak to you differently.'

Hari was now looking away. His chin was lifted, his eyes were narrowed. 'I daresay you are right. I shall have to think it over. But, in the meantime, to turn to practical matters: The day is very near when I shall no longer have any excuse for lying idle here.'

'Hari Khan! I don't want to seem obstinate, but I must say my say. It is no use your trying to solve your practical problems while your underlying ideas remain in confusion. Stay here until you are strong enough to make an attempt to get back to Sita. And then explain yourself fully to her.'

Hari frowned and made a gesture of impatience.

Undeterred, the Guru continued: 'I am convinced that your sympathy for Salim, your mistrust of Akbar, and your condemnation of Daniyal are expressive of something important in your nature. You should compel Sita to understand this. In other words, it is for you to show yourself to her as you are; for she must certainly love you enough to love you as you are.'

Hari, whose face was now flushed, rose slowly to his feet. 'Are you sure of that? Perhaps my character is too unpleasant.'

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'No, it is not unpleasant. What stands in your way is pride.'

'Isn't that unpleasant? Perhaps I don't love her enough?'

'No, what you lack is faith — or I might call it moral courage. Not even one's love can do without that.'

Hari shrugged and walked slowly back to the house.

IN the slow, uneventful passage of the next few days Hari felt himself to be rapidly gaining strength, but the satisfaction that he expected to get from this did not come. Although he was now longing to leave the dell, he shrank from re-entering the world just as much as before. Further conversation with the Guru he succeeded in avoiding. He spent most of his time by himself, in spite of the fact that he found his own company odious.

One dark windless evening, after going to bed early, he lay awake in the grip of an emotion very like despair. His inability to make up his mind was suffocating him.

At last he got up and stood at his door, looking out into the dark. A distant sound of merry-making floated across the fields, and presently he saw the dim figure of Mahabir come round the corner of the house.

'Where are you going?' he called out.

'It is a feast-day, My Lord. I am going to my master who is in the village of Dhar.'

'What is he doing there?'

'They have been quarrelling and fighting because they are drunk, and my master is attending to those who are hurt.'

'God will reward him!' murmured Hari, and his eyes followed the white figure of the boy as it disappeared up the shadowy cliff.

His restlessness continued. After pacing up and down between the house and the well for some time, he went farther up to the end of the hollow where a few trees grew in a bay. Sitting down on the warm sand, he listened to a drunken peasant who was singing some way off. It was curious what an impression of happy, mindless indifference those tuneless bellowings conveyed. They evoked a dim, rude world in which there was no care, no recollection of the past, and no looking forward into the future. They were the voice of a timeless present that was overflowing with besotted well-being. Hari smiled, wishing the singer well. But as the man drew nearer his noise became an offence against the quiet of the night, and at last, when the drunken voice sounded almost immediately above his head, he jumped up, shouting a word of warning. But it was too late. There followed a crashing sound among the branches of the

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trees, and a dark object rolled out upon the sand. 'Finished!' said Hari to himself. 'And not a bad end either!'

He went up to the man who was lying silent and still. As he bent over, however, a wheezy chuckle rose to his ears, and the drunken song was feebly taken up at the point at which it had stopped.

'By Shiva! You are a stout fellow!' exclaimed Hari, amazed, and he began to feel the man over, but was soon cursed for his pains.

'Very well! Lie there and enjoy yourself while the drink is still alive in you.'

His breath reeking of rice-spirit, the man asked for his gourd.

'Your gourd! Oh come! You are expecting too much! Your gourd . . .' He broke off, for there was the gourd intact at his feet. He picked it up. The cork still in place.

'Friend!' said the drunkard sleepily, 'it was a cruel blow you gave me just now, but it is forgiven. Drink! You are welcome!' And with that he began to snore.

Hari looked at the gourd thoughtfully, then sat down and drank. The heat of the liquor was painful, for he was unaccustomed to raw spirits; but quite suddenly his mind and body were changed; he was filled with intense happiness. He looked up at the moon and the stars; the night in her beauty ravished him; his spirit floated in beatitude.

The Guru, returning in the small hours of the morning, went to his room and stood by the window, looking up into the night-sky. He was tired, for he had walked many miles, and pity lay heavily upon his heart.

After a minute his attention was caught by a faint noise that puzzled him. It came from the darkness beyond the fountain — an odd choking and muttering. For a few moments he listened, then, convinced that his imagination was not tricking him, he went out and moved quickly and silently across the grass. A figure appeared in the starlight, then disappeared under the trees, then reappeared again. It moved with random and unsteady steps. To his dismay he recognized Hari.

Running forward he caught hold of him by both shoulders. 'Hari! What is the matter?'

There was no answer, and Hari's body beneath his hands felt nerveless and cold.

'Hari, my friend,' he murmured with great gentleness, 'come with me. You are ill. But I know what to do.'

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Hari made a strange sound that was meant to be a laugh. 'You know what to do? No, no! No one knows, no one knows.'

'Come!'

He guided Hari a little way towards the house; but suddenly met with resistance. Hari dragged himself free, staggered a few yards and sank down upon a patch of sand under the cliff. 'Not yet. — Wait!'

The Guru sat beside him and took one of his hands. It was damp with sweat.

'Tell me!' he said in a low voice.

'There is nothing to tell. I know what you don't know. You are sane. I am mad.' His teeth chattered. 'No! But I wish to God I were mad.'

While he rocked his body to and fro the Guru waited.

'You talk of Spirit.' Hari's voice was a hoarse whisper. 'What do you know of Spirit? You have it; you live by it; all men live by it. The meanest creature alive lives by it — without knowing it. But I know what it is to be without it. Without it! Death-in-life.' He choked, his teeth chattering, and became still.

The Guru put an arm round his shoulders and waited.

'Listen,' said Hari a few minutes later. He had controlled his shivering and was speaking in dull, hard tones. 'I will tell you the most terrible thing in the world. The Spirit is not master, but slave. That which is not Spirit has it at its mercy. Do you realize what this means? I have been where the truth looks you in the face. Do you think I have not fought? But the Other — it wins! It wins! Nothing can help — nothing.'

He went on: 'Listen! Men live by the Spirit. It keeps them courageous, sane. But there are men who cease to be men, and I am one. Spirit ebbs, I sink into the depths, I sink into the dark, into the cold, into the desolation of loneliness. I am damned — but not splendidly — no, I am small and despicable and ashamed. Would to God I were mad, for then there would be hope for others — but I am not even mad.'

'Listen! Do you know what that emptiness is? You do not; but I will tell you. Consider how it is when you are filled with the Spirit; your heart expands, you rejoice in the gloriousness of life, you know beauty, you know courage, you know faith, you glow with the warmth of companionship; you trust. What, then, is my emptiness? Is it void? No; not void. A wind goes screaming through it, the wind of Fear.'

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He gripped the Guru's knee with his hand. 'What do *you* know of Fear? There are things that are terrible, there are things that are horrible; but what of them? There is torture and death; but what are they? Nothing. I tell you there is Terror beyond the Terrible, there is Horror beyond the Horrible. There is Fear-in-itself. Do you think that Fear needs any support, any cause? No! Fear stands all alone. The things to be feared are limited, but Fear is without limits. If happiness can be beyond all telling, how much more unspeakable is Fear? Fear is the hell into which you sink *alone*. It is the solitary dark — where all courage, and all love, and all hope, are dead. *They* are of reality, but Fear is of unreality — which has no bounds, no law. It is without the mercy of madness in which you can fling your life away. In true, hot madness you can find the courage of despair. But Fear is the cold madness that keeps you still. Fear, I tell you, is Spirit conquered; it is the living, living, living . . .' His voice died away.

For a long time they sat there. The Guru kept his arm about Hari's shoulders, and he felt life gradually coming back. Staring sadly before him into the dark, he said nothing. It was true that he had never experienced what Hari had described, but his imagination told him enough. The misery of the world — the physical and mental tortures that men endure — hung over him like a great cloud in the night-sky, and the small, cold fingers of unbelief began to finger the warm body of his faith. He pushed them away, he invoked the greatest of the eternal powers, and once again dedicated himself blindly, but with full recognition of his blindness.

The next morning the Guru rose early, looked in at Hari's window, and was well pleased at seeing him peacefully asleep. A little later, too, Mahabir reported that, beyond looking rather haggard, Hari showed no signs of being disturbed either in health or spirits. The Guru said nothing, and went off to spend the morning among the villagers; but in the afternoon he joined his guest under the willow.

'Well, Guru!' Hari called out as soon as he appeared. 'I hear that our drunken friend of last night took himself off this morning apparently none the worse. As for me, I deserve a pretty bad headache, but by some miracle, I, too, have got off scot free.'

The Guru gave him a low, gentle laugh, while he spread his mat in the usual place. 'The arrack you drank was of very bad quality.

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Even the men accustomed to that stuff suffer from it. In the villages that I have been visiting there are many aching heads to-day.'

There was a brief pause, which Hari ended by saying hurriedly: 'What's the news? Have you been into Daulatpur?'

'Yes. Rajah Bhoj sent for me.' He hesitated. 'Conditions everywhere are getting worse, I'm afraid.'

'What did Bhoj want of you?'

'He wanted me to tell the people to submit to their miseries.'

'What are their miseries?'

'Cholera, civil war, famine — and then these new taxes.'

Abruptly Hari sprang up from his couch. Standing before the Guru, he said: 'I really can't go on lying here any longer. I must — go.'

The Guru looked up at him. 'Where?' he said quietly.

Hari was silent. After a moment the Guru said. 'It has been my hope, as you know, that you would decide to go back to Sita and discuss things with her before doing anything else, but now — now I'm afraid, that can't be done. The military situation makes it impossible.'

No gleam of expression appeared on Hari's face. 'Well!' His tone was even. 'I shall have to adhere to my original plan which was to go to Agra and make my peace with Akbar.'

There was a pause.

'In a very few days I shall be well enough.'

'Perhaps. But what are you going to say to him?'

'What indeed!' Hari laughed lightly. 'Have you any suggestions to make, Guru?'

'Well . . .'

Hari, who had bent down to stroke the monkey, looked up surprised. 'Oh! So you have?'

'Well, I was thinking that your past is not very bad — I mean, you have never actually plotted against Akbar — so why not be as frank as possible about it? And then, having got rid of that, why not describe your feelings about the political situation as it stands to-day?'

Hari stared at the Guru incredulously. 'Are you serious?'

'Certainly. I don't see why you shouldn't explain to Akbar that your only objection to fighting on his side is that you disapprove of Daniyal. Of course, this will have to be said tactfully.'

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Hari began to laugh, then he checked himself. 'Guru, you are not serious.'

'Indeed I am.'

'But . . .' Hari stopped and shook his head.

'Now, listen!' said the Guru earnestly. 'Why should Akbar feel ill-disposed towards you? You have never done him any harm. He probably suspects you of all sorts of disloyalties which you have never committed. Well, disabuse him! Then again, you have good reasons for disapproving of Daniyal. Why should you conceal them from him? In the depths of his heart he will recognize that what you say contains a good deal of truth. In any case, he will come to an understanding of your character — and that is the really important point.'

Hari continued to stare.

'Of course,' the Guru went on, 'you should also tell him that you like Salim — and why. Although he is very angry with Salim at this moment, he will be quick to understand you, because there is a great deal of natural sympathy between father and son.'

Hari gave a nod, then, speaking slowly and gravely, 'Guru,' he said, 'your suggestions are not so wild as they at first appeared to me. But — they are not really practical.'

'Why not?'

Hari made an impatient gesture. 'Well!' — his eyes wandered round helplessly — 'For one thing, because Akbar would lose his temper before I had fairly begun. And that would mean instant imprisonment — probably to be followed by execution.'

The Guru smiled. 'You would be taking certain risks, I admit.'

'Look here!' said Hari, knitting his brows. 'You, as a Holy Man and a personal friend of Akbar's, might be able to take that line, but I can't. I can't begin discussing his sons with him.'

'No. You should begin by telling him about yourself. Let him see you as you truly are. Your life . . .'

'By Shiva!' exclaimed Hari, not without annoyance. 'What you are really suggesting is that I should take that man into my confidence! Talk to him as a friend! But he's not my friend, and I'm not accustomed . . .'

'Well, why not break your custom?'

'I don't care to. That's all. — Besides, what you suggest is not practicable.'

'I think you mean that it would not be usual.'



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'It would not. — And do you realize that I was once an officer in the Royal Body Guard? In all probability, when I have my audience of Akbar, there will be half a dozen of my old friends standing round. Really, you know, Guru . . .'

There was a long silence, then the other sighed and said: 'It is for you to place these considerations against . . .'

He broke off, for a group of peasants were to be seen coming down the cliff. 'Against other considerations. For you must remember that not only your future but Sita's is at stake. — But now I must leave you.'

LOOKING out of his window the next day, the Guru saw Hari walking up and down beside the well, and his face wore an expression which made the Guru say to himself: 'I believe he is ready to speak!'

He remained by the window, and in a little while Hari caught sight of him and approached. Standing on the grass outside, he looked into the Guru's eyes with a smile, which, although faintly ironical, was open and friendly. 'I have been thinking about what you said to me yesterday,' he said.

'Well?'

'Perhaps it is not as impracticable as I thought.' The smile on his face broadened, and he went on: 'I might even make something rather amusing of it.'

'Oh,' returned the Guru, hastily, 'it was not for that . . .'

'I know. But all the same . . .'

He laughed. 'I must try to get into touch with Akbar. On that point you are right.'

The Guru said nothing, but after a moment he left the window and came out of the house. Together they walked slowly over the grass to their usual place under the tree. Hari threw himself down on his cushions and began scratching the monkey under the chin. 'Last night I slept well,' he said. 'And I had not done that for a long time.'

'Did you feel — clearer in your mind?'

'No. I just gave up.'

The Guru made no answer.

'You see,' Hari went on lightly, 'my situation is really too complicated.'

'It's not merely your situation.'

'I know. It's my inner condition. And that's what I'm not going to worry about any more.'

'Well,' said the Guru, 'if you can manage it . . .'

'I will tell you a dream I had last night,' said Hari. 'It's a dream that I have had several times lately. It tells me a good deal, and it may tell you more. I dream that I am standing on the Great Pyramid in Egypt, and I want to make my way to the centre. I go in by a small passage and wander, hoping and expecting, but always failing to get to my goal. Sometimes the central chamber

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seems very near, but my passage always turns in the wrong direction at the last moment, and I am carried far away again. Sometimes I hear others in another passage, I hear them through the thickness of the wall, and *they* are getting to the centre. But between my system of passages and theirs, there seems to be no communication. I meet no one, and I get nowhere.'

'That's a good dream,' said the Guru.

Hari hesitated. 'I am not sure that I really understand it. Why can't I reach the centre?'

The Guru sighed.

'No. You needn't tell me,' said Hari.

'There is one thing I should like to say,' the Guru murmured, after a silence.

'Very well!'

'Your true self is living too much alone. That would account, partly, for the attacks of anguish from which you suffer.'

'But I have lots of friends — and there's Sita.'

'Yes. But your *true* self is isolated — behind a barrier of pretences.'

'I don't pretend. I'm *too* honest, if anything.'

The Guru gave a sigh. 'You want to live as a type, but you are not one of those who can. Many people are satisfied to communicate with one another merely as members of a type, but the personal spirit in you craves for something more. You must not hold it aloof from other persons as persons — for to do that is to hold it aloof from Spirit as a whole.'

Hari laughed, but uncomfortably. 'I don't think I know what you mean by Spirit,' he muttered.

'Don't you? That's curious. For last night you talked about Spirit as if the word had been on my lips first. But it had not.'

Again Hari was silent.

The Guru leaned forward, and now his voice and manner were both very grave. 'I mean by Spirit what you mean. And I mean by faith an activity — the courage of Spirit. You should have faith in your love for Sita — and in hers for you. You should put that love to the test of candour. When it emerges unhurt you will see how beautiful and valuable is true communication between person and person, and you will be saved from your secret fear. Your fear, your anguish, has no outside cause, as you have yourself observed. It springs from . . .'

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His voice died away, for he noticed that Hari's attention had been distracted, and, glancing up in the direction of his gaze, he saw that a man on horseback was standing by the edge of the cliff and looking down into the dell. The newcomer wore a uniform which proclaimed him to be an officer in the Imperial Guard. His mount was an Arab. Man and horse, outlined against the sky, made an image of great beauty.

'Who can that be?' Hari muttered. 'I seem to know him. Is it Randhir?'

His presence noticed, the stranger waved a hand and dismounted. While he was tying his horse to the rail, the Guru turned to Hari. 'Yes, it's Randhir,' he said, and in his voice there was a note of regret.

'Randhir's a good fellow.'

'He is. But I was wishing he hadn't come just at this moment.'

Hari was passing his hand over his hair and buttoning up his tunic. 'Nice of him to come,' he said absently, and he jumped to his feet.

'He would have come before, only you told me to keep everybody away.'

'Yes. I've not really been fit for human society.'

Randhir was now coming down the steps. His sword tucked under his arm to prevent it from knocking against the cliff, he moved with leisurely grace. 'Well, Hari!' he called out. 'Here I am, whether you like it or not! And you can't pretend that you're too ill to see me. I've never seen you looking better in your life.'

Hari, advancing across the grass, made a laughing reply, and for a few moments the two stood there. Then, turning to the Guru with his charming smile, 'He does you credit, doesn't he?' Randhir went on. 'But let's have a look at the wound. Is there anything left worth showing to Akbar? If so, he ought to come to Agra with me. A nice scar is always worth a decoration.'

'Decorations be damned!' exclaimed Hari with gaiety. 'Don't you know that I've recently been ordered into exile?' And he gave a brief and humorous account of his recent afflictions.

His voice and manner were now so different from what they had been ten minutes ago that he seemed a different man. 'By all the gods!' he cried in conclusion, 'I've half a mind to go to Agra with you! When do you start? And what are you going there for? Is Devi getting bored at Daulatpur?'

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'No. But I wouldn't blame her if she was. Just now she's on a visit to the Sesodia.'

'The Sesodia!' Hari gave a grin. 'Well, I've just been a guest of the Sesodia's too.' And his description of the castle and its discomforts made Randhir shout with amusement.

'Well! When do you start?' asked Hari again.

'To-morrow. Will you really come?' He turned to the Guru. 'Is he fit for it?'

The Guru shook his head.

'No?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'Guru,' said Randhir laughingly, 'I believe you're keeping him here just in order to talk philosophy to him. I was watching you from the cliff for quite a time, and not daring to interrupt — so deep were you both in your discussion. What was it all about, Hari?'

His words were obviously spoken in all innocence, but Hari flushed deeply. At once Randhir went on: 'I mustn't try to persuade you if the Guru doesn't approve. And anyhow I should see very little of you in Agra.'

'Why? What's your business there?'

'My business?' Randhir gave him a sardonic look. 'I am going to join up! Yes, by Shiva, I am going to the aid of my Emperor. Do you realize that Salim will be marching victoriously into Agra in another week or two unless something is done? When Akbar was here last month he hinted to me that my proper place was on the field of battle and I pretended not to hear. Now, however — well now, it's different! Not that I care one jot what becomes of his wretched Empire, or which of his wretched sons succeeds him. But after all . . .' And Randhir ended with a shrug.

Hari was silent for a moment, then he too shrugged and said: 'Personally, I'd rather fight for Salim.'

'Take it turn and turn about,' suggested Randhir with a yawn.

The Guru had been looking at Randhir attentively. 'Do you know where Akbar is going to send you?' he inquired.

'Well, I've offered to go to the Jhelum valley. I pointed out that by riding down that way one can turn Salim's flank.'

A small, sharp exclamation came from the Guru. He opened his mouth to speak, then with a shake of the head, turned away.

'What's wrong?' asked Hari, surprised.

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Randhir gave a little laugh, plucked at the grass, and said: 'There's a good deal of cholera in the Jhelum.'

'My dear Randhir!' The Guru had faced round again, and his voice was quiet and sad. 'I won't say anything about the danger to your own life, but — for the sake of the men you will be taking with you, and in pity for the men, women, and children who are sickening and dying out there — don't, I beseech you, carry this war into that unhappy country! I beseech you, if you go to the Jhelum, go to help the people there, not to make their miseries worse.'

Randhir was silent, then he gave a smile. 'I am afraid I know very little about fighting the cholera, Guru. That's not my business. And unfortunately the other kind of fighting is.'

To this the Guru made no reply, but turned away again, and there was an awkward pause, until Randhir, rolling over on the grass, smiled up at Hari, and said lightly: 'By the way, I mustn't forget — before I go — to give you a message from Lakshmi. She wants you and the Guru to come over to dinner. Come any day you like, she says, only let it be soon.'

For the last minute or two Hari's expression had been strange. What he now did was to give a little laugh and look up into the sky.

'You're well enough for that, at any rate,' Randhir went on, still smiling, although puzzled. 'Isn't he, Guru?'

'Oh, I'm well enough.' Hari's tone was careless. 'In fact, I'm also well enough to travel to Agra with you. I shall come.'

Randhir sat up. 'What do you think about that, Guru? Not very wise, is it?'

The Guru's face was thoughtful. He refrained from looking up, because he knew that Hari's eyes were fixed upon him and that in them he would see a gleam of defiant self-will.

'I should have liked Hari to stay here a little longer, but — of course, if he feels strong enough . . .'

'Well!' said Randhir, springing to his feet. 'Don't decide anything to-night, Hari. See how you feel to-morrow morning.'

Hari got up and gave himself a little shake, as if he were shaking off some oppression. 'That's all right,' he said shortly. 'I'm coming with you to-morrow. What time do you start?'

'I was going to start quite early, but . . .'

'Why not? It's better to avoid the heat of the day.'

The three men now strolled to the foot of the cliff, and as they

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went they made arrangements for Hari's departure. A palanquin was to be sent out for him at once; he was to spend the night with Randhir in Daulatpur; and an early start would be made the next morning.

As soon as they were alone again Hari turned to the Guru and laid a hand on his arm. 'Guru!' His tone was one of contrition and earnest entreaty. 'Guru, don't think me ungrateful! Believe me, I am not!'

The other looked into his face, and smiled. 'My friend, I know you are not.'

They went indoors, and in the time that was left Hari showed by every means in his power that his last words were true.

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## PART THREE

AFTER leaving Hari with the Guru Jali continued his ride over the moonlit plain. The hour he had spent in the dell had sufficed to convince him that Hari could not be in better hands. For the rest, too tired to think, he was well satisfied to follow the Guru's directions. So with a letter of introduction to Rajah Bhoj in his pocket he jogged along sleepily beside Mahabir, who had been sent to show him the way.

For some ten miles they rode between fields of green crops, then, having passed under a heavily battlemented gateway, went through alleys narrower than any Jali had ever seen before, until in the very heart of the labyrinth they came to a stop before an enormous door.

The door was set in a wall, high, massive and ancient. All round was silence and darkness. Expecting a long wait, Jali fell into a dream; but Mahabir's whispered colloquy with the porter had rapid results. After a few minutes he was admitted to the Palace and brought before the Court Chamberlain; and this man lost no time in ushering him into the presence of the Rajah himself. Rajah Bhoj was a tall, ascetic-looking man in his middle years, slow and precise of speech, courtly in address, and unmistakably kindly. To his amiable phrases Jali responded with the lifeless politeness of extreme fatigue, and the Rajah, observing his condition, did not keep him long. In less than an hour after his arrival he was asleep in bed.

For the whole period of his stay there the Palace remained a dream-like place for Jali — a spot unconnected in time and space with the rest of the material world. Its situation, to begin with, was strange in his eyes; for it was at once surrounded by, and extremely remote from, the common habitations of men. He knew no other palace that was not set apart, removed from the swarming populace, but this dark, ancient building was shouldered by the poor, whose squalid hovels clung, like swallows' nests, to its thick, frowning walls. The crowd, however, if near, was very far from making itself felt. Not a sound could come through those isolating depths of stone; and if you cared to remember that an outside world existed, that consciousness only enhanced your sense of privileged seclusion.

The Palace itself, Jali soon discovered, was very large — so large, indeed, that he never learnt to find his way about it. The Ranees



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herself admitted that she would rather not set out to some of the more distant rooms without taking an old servant as a guide. The courts, cloisters, and enclosed gardens were numberless, and all were equally empty, equally still, except for the cries of the peacocks and parrots that inhabited many of them.

The rooms assigned to Jali were quiet and remote — a long way off from those occupied by anyone else. He met the Rajah and Ranee only at appointed times, the rest of the day being his own to do what he liked with. But never did these solitary hours hang heavy on his hands; on the contrary, he delighted in his leisure and independence.

With Rajah Bhoj his intercourse was formal but pleasant. Formality, indeed, was the Rajah's chief characteristic; it stamped his every utterance, his every thought, and even his emotions. His company was of a restful equability. When he told his favourite cat to get off the chair, or gave an order to a servant, or addressed his wife, his tone and manner were always exactly the same. With Jali he would discuss public affairs, the ramifications of kinship among his peers, and questions of precedence in the Imperial Court. It mattered little that Jali was without much to say on these subjects, for the Rajah required no more than a courteous attention. - These conversations took place in lofty rooms of an old-fashioned stateliness. Earnest attempts at modernization had been made by the Rajah, who pointed them out with pride, for he was determined not to be old-fashioned. Fashions in his opinion might legitimately change — but not anything else. When change of any other kind took place that was because something had gone wrong. 'History repeats itself!' he would say, meaning that it should.

As for Ranee Lakshmi, the moment Jali cast his eyes upon her he was fascinated. The meeting took place in one of the beautiful, cloistered courts. She was leaning against a pillar, throwing crumbs to her white peacocks and white doves. She herself was dressed in white, and her sari, thrown back, showed the lovely line of her neck down to her lovely shoulders. The gold of her polished skin and the light blue of her eyes were accentuated by the dead-white of the silk. Edged with crimson, her sari was caught in at the waist, and revealed the little gold sandals on her feet. Jali's gaze returned to her eyes, the sky-blue of which was so dreamy that one could look into it without meeting her. In these moments she was to him less a person than a thing — a tranquil and lovely thing that it was natural

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to stare at. No doubt the person in her was accustomed to retire, leaving you this liberty, and only when you had had your fill would she gradually re-inhabit herself. So now she soon returned to give him a smile that welled up like the day, lighting those blue eyes and waking the whole face to a gentle, surprised pleasure.

Jali was expecting to be shy, but his breath had been taken away, and shyness had gone with it. She slid into conversation with a movement as imperceptible as that of her descent from her dreams. But there was no dreaminess, as he soon discovered, about her talk; the mind that she called to earth was alert, ironical, and keen. On his first morning in the Palace he had been astonished at finding that his room was plentifully furnished with books. There were volumes of poetry both old and new, and a variety of other books as well. At once he had been delighted by the taste that had inspired this selection, wondering whose it was. Now he knew. And what a delicate humour the Ranee had too! When, after an hour, he went back to his rooms, he moved in the haze of an airy intoxication. Unimaginable were the turns of fortune that life had in store for one!

But of course these days were only an interlude — not a part of his real life. At first he was keenly aware of this, feeling himself to be a stranger. Little by little, however, that feeling lost its hold. Everything in his daily routine contributed to diminishing it — the grave discourses of the Rajah (who treated him not only as his equal in years but in experience of the world), Ranee Lakshmi's wise, witty talk (which made him feel that he was almost as wise and witty as she), and not least the hours that he spent in his own company. In his solitary meditations he saw himself rapidly becoming a fitting member of this new world, and with this came a very pleasant gain in self-esteem and self-possession. Lightly as these people wore their importance, that importance everywhere proclaimed itself, and to be on terms of equality with them was undeniably to be of a certain importance oneself.

But it was not exactly thus that Jali put the matter in his own thoughts. He remembered how Gokal had once said to him that what he needed in order to find himself was to live among strangers who would judge him on his own merits alone. 'In all your adventures,' Gokal had said, 'at the Agra Palace, at Khanjo, and at the Pleasance of the Arts you were moved by a blind

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instinct to establish yourself in your own eyes as a self-determining, self-responsible person. Whenever you have felt rebellious against your parents you have really been chafing against your own inner dependence on them. Nevertheless the chains that vex you have not been put upon you by them but forged out of your own weakness. Your father and mother possess strong personalities, and strong personalities exercise strong influences even when they are unaware of it.' 'Yes,' thought Jali, 'Gokal was right.'

His windows looked out on a small court, and in the cool of the evening he would draw up his sun-blind of woven rush and sit gazing down into the green dusk below, where a fountain, set in a little lawn bordered by cypresses, sent up a silver shower. The other windows looking upon this court were all shuttered, and never did he see them open, nor anyone set foot on the grass below. Never did he set foot on it himself, although on several occasions he looked for an entrance.

In a far-away part of the Palace an ancient crocodile had its home in a deep, green pool, and just before midnight, when it was expecting its food, it would set up a hoarse bark. Sitting in the moonlight by his window, Jali learnt to count on that bark — a distant, heavy repetition of harsh sound.

Sometimes he could hardly bring himself to go to bed, so strong, so exquisite, was the feeling by which he was possessed. The moon, now low and catching only the fountain's topmost drops, the stars now brighter in their vault above, the fireflies still dancing in the dark beneath, the splash of water, the silence, the tragic, soundless hastening of the great world through time — it caught at his heart, it filled his eyes, it was anguish not to be a poet.

At the back of his mind during these days there was not a little anxiety on account of Hari. It was his custom to ride over to the dell every day, but Hari was never in a condition to exchange more than two or three words with him, and the Guru's reports were now becoming less encouraging. Into his anxiety there entered an element of self-reproach, and although he was unable to find anything in his past or present behaviour that was blameworthy, these feelings persisted. Moreover, the threat of death which hung over Hari brought a great pity for his mother into his heart. At times he was wrapped up in a cloud of recollection that somewhat alienated him from his new friends; for although Bhoj and Lakshmi

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were unfailing in their inquiries, their suggestions, and their expressions of sympathy, the life of the Palace naturally went on unchanged, and he felt his inner preoccupations to be somehow out of place.

On these evenings, when he sat at his window in the moonlight, his thoughts would travel back to the night of his arrival at the dell. This same moon was now shining down into it, and the water was bubbling up into the brimming trough, and the little house was gleaming white, and the monkey on the roof was feeling sad — sad because his wandering mind could not fix upon any one thing. He would touch the slivers of glass to make music, he would look up at the stars, he would sigh and pluck at his fur, he would snatch at a passing moth. 'Am I like him?' Jali wondered.

Late one evening, as he was trying to write some verses, but scratching out his words almost as soon as they were written down, there came a knock at the door, and he was startled by the entrance of a servant who announced that Rajah Bhoj was outside asking if he might come in. This was a thing the Rajah had never done before, and Jali, not a little flustered, jumped up from his seat.

The Rajah came forward with a charming, deprecatory smile. 'My dear Jali, I hope I'm not disturbing you. I really have very little excuse for this intrusion, but it came into my mind about half an hour ago that I had made an extraordinary mistake at dinner. You will recollect that I said that my great-uncle Sambidananda Bhoj married the daughter of the Rajah of Patniwar; but of course it was not he but his half-brother who made that marriage. My grandfather often used to say . . .' And for half an hour they paced up and down while the Rajah added pertinent information.

Before taking his leave, however, he turned to another topic. The date of Akbar's pilgrimage to the Guru's Holy Well was now approaching, and the whole town was awaiting this event with great excitement. After visiting the dell His Majesty would devote twenty-four hours to meditation and prayer; then, having exchanged his garments of penitence for robes of State, he would appear with a fanfare of trumpets at the door of his Imperial Tent, known as the Abode of Light. This tent was now being erected outside the southern gate of the town; and the moment of his emergence would be one of great splendour and rejoicing.

This Jali already knew. What the Rajah had now to add was that Akbar had promised to honour him and the Ranee with his

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company one evening. He made this announcement so casually that it took Jali some minutes to realize how important it was. In fact several days passed before he arrived at a full understanding of the magnitude of the approaching event. The Rajah and Ranee continued to talk of it very lightly, but the serene air of the Palace was perceptibly stirred by the breath of expectancy.

On the very morning of the great day, however, a heavy blow fell. News of it came to Jali through the mouth of Mustapha Hassan, the Keeper of the Rajah's Wardrobe, who had been fitting him out with a special costume for the occasion. The Emperor had cancelled his visit! It was abominable! All the preparations gone for nothing! There would be no supper! no entertainment! no party at all!

'But why?' cried Jali. 'What has happened?'

The fat little Persian shrugged. 'The Emperor is like that. He doesn't know how to behave. Pah! how should he, a barbarian, understand the ancient nobility of this country? He . . .'

'But he must have some reason? What does the Rajah say about it?'

'The Rajah, he smiles! Is he perturbed? No. Our Rajah cannot be perturbed by such people. He smiles — and the Ranee, too, she smiles.'

Jali felt indignant on behalf of his host and hostess, but on pressing the man further, he learnt that serious news had just arrived from Agra. It was officially reported that the Imperial forces opposing Salim had suffered so disastrous a defeat that the city itself was now actually in danger of capture.

On hearing this Jali stared into Mustapha Hassan's large flabby face in frank amazement. 'Oh, so that's all? Akbar has no more excuse than that?'

But sarcasm was wasted on Mustapha, who merely shrugged again. 'Well, there is also the cholera, of course.'

'Has it come to Daulatpur?'

'To Daulatpur? What are you saying, Prince? No, no! That would be terrible.'

'But it is spreading?'

The man's hand swept the horizon. 'Everywhere! And bad — very bad, they say.'

'Fool!' exclaimed Jali to himself, as he escorted him politely to the door.

A little later he went down to a small, cloistered court, where at this hour he was accustomed to meet the Ranee. He knew that she

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and Rajah Bhoj, and all their friends, were supporters of Daniyal's — not enthusiastic supporters, but inclined to believe that Salim would make the more undesirable Emperor. What, he wondered, would the Ranee be feeling about this news? And what would Rajah Bhoj have to say?

The court was empty, but on the shady side of it there was a table set out with fruit and sweetmeats, which showed that Lakshmi was to be expected; nor was it long before she appeared. She picked up a bunch of grapes, and, while he was eagerly putting his questions, continued to eat them; she was smiling a little, her beautiful eyes fixed upon the ground.

'Yes,' she nodded. 'It's true. There has been a defeat.'

'A really big defeat?'

'A bigger one, I'm afraid, than Akbar bargained for.'

'But did he bargain for any?'

'Well, he could hardly bear to see Salim, his eldest son, beaten in the field by anyone but himself, could he?'

'Oh, I hadn't thought of that.'

'When all his best generals have been defeated — and he makes sure they will by giving them much too few men — he'll take the field himself; and then Salim will have to look out.'

Her level voice of amusement had great charm. She went on: 'One of his generals happens to be my brother. He tells me that *his* method of dealing with the situation is to run away.'

Jali laughed.

'They say Daniyal is beginning to be afraid that he'll be sent to the front, and declares he won't go unless surrounded by a body-guard of Amazons commanded by your aunt Ambissa. By the way, what is your last news of Hari Khan? No better? I'm so sorry! He can't have been well enough to see the Emperor — which is a pity. If he could have joined him in his devotions, he might have obtained a pardon on the spot! The Guru must be glad it's all over; I don't think he cares much for that kind of thing, although of course it is rather a feather in his cap.' She glanced over her shoulder, for the Rajah was approaching. He wore a smile which seemed to Jali to be a little strained.

After greeting the young man he turned to his wife. 'I'm afraid you must have had a hard morning, my dear. Nothing is more tiresome than cancelling invitations at the last moment. I really do think . . .'

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'It's all done — every bit of it! And much more easily than you would imagine.' She turned to Jali with gaiety in her eyes. 'We shall have a lovely, small party this evening — not more than eight or nine — with Tansen all to ourselves. Have you ever heard him? No? Oh, then you will have a thrill. Tansen's singing is not like anyone else's; is it, Bhoj?'

The Rajah's face was not reflecting the serenity of his wife's. 'These singers are touchy people, and I can only hope that the Emperor's lack of manners won't put Tansen out. It's odd that Akbar is unable to learn. Twenty-five years spent among us . . .'

Again Lakshmi interrupted him. 'Oh no! Tansen will be almost as thankful as I am to escape a large, formal affair. My dear, what is the trouble of putting off a few guests compared with the anxiety of having the Emperor under one's roof!' She turned to Jali. 'Besides, Akbar always terrifies me. He's too big, his eyes glitter too much, his voice is too deep. My voice seems to get higher and squeakier, and my remarks sillier and thinner, every moment I'm with him.'

'Well, if *you* don't mind,' returned the Rajah with a slight stiffness, 'I certainly have no right to complain. But . . .' changing his tone to one of dispassionate interest, he addressed himself again to Jali . . . 'it's curious, isn't it, how something, some quality of mind or nature, seems to be wanting in these people. Or perhaps it would be more charitable to put it down to their lack of tradition — the absence of any background of culture. None of *us* could ever have behaved like this. Imagine me, for instance, in Akbar's position — well aware that preparations had been made for entertaining me — do you suppose that I . . .' He went on at some length in this vein, but Jali's attention wandered. He was admiring Lakshmi, whose self-control now, as always, was wonderful. That she was impatient by nature he felt sure; something told him that she lived in a constant state of tension, although she never gave a direct sign of it. Never had he seen her fidgeting; perhaps, indeed, it was the very stillness of her body, the tranquillity of her gaze, the perfect timing of both her movements and her speech, that gave him his clue. That she would not interrupt her husband a third time was certain, nor was it for him of course to cut the Rajah short; but as soon as an opportunity came he introduced the subject of the cholera epidemic, asking whether Mustapha Hassan had not been guilty of exaggeration.

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The Rajah's answers were vague, but he went on to relieve Jali's anxieties by declaring that the district in which his parents found themselves was very far from danger. 'It won't affect their plans,' he said.

'And yours?' asked Jali. 'Does Salim's victory, or the cholera, change your plans in any way?' He was referring to a series of visits which his hosts had in mind.

Lakshmi shook her head. 'We start in about a month, certainly not earlier. And that leaves you plenty of time to look about you and decide where you would like to stay after we are gone. Both Devi and Maya, as you know, would be only too delighted to take you in, or any of the others . . . It's for you to decide what you would like best.'

Jali looked down with a certain embarrassment. The question had come up once before, for Mohan, the Rajah's brother, had already offered him hospitality, and he had then told Lakshmi that there was no other house to which he would rather go. Indeed, of all his new acquaintances there was none he liked better than Prince Mohan. But now she was making no direct reference to that; and since then he had noticed, too, that Mohan and his wife, Princess Damayanti, were not very frequent guests at the Palace. In fact he had not yet met the Princess.

As if she were able to read his thoughts Lakshmi went on: 'By the way, you will be seeing Damayanti, too, to-night, and I want you to make a point of talking to her, for I'm sure you will like one another. She and Mohan live in the country, you know, and it's not often I can persuade them to come to us.' With this she got up and, moving away, gave him a smile over her shoulder. 'To-night, remember! — in the Court of the Silver Lotus'



ON his way back to his rooms Jali was so deeply preoccupied by thoughts about the forthcoming party that he actually lost his way. It was by no means unusual for him to leave Lakshmi's company in something of a daze. She produced, like a high altitude, exhilaration, breathlessness, and a faint, indefinable sense of strain. But this time, instead of looking back to see if he had been up to the mark, he was sending his thoughts forward — eagerly, but not without trepidation.

And meanwhile he had gone astray. He had wandered into a part of the Palace which was quite unknown to him. Of course there were servants stationed here and there, but he couldn't for very shame apply to them. What would they think of a young man who lost himself upon a journey that he had already made twenty times or more? He was sauntering on with an affected carelessness when the clear, ringing voice of a child sounded from somewhere quite near. He listened and smiled; that voice was so very unself-conscious, so completely unrestrained!

Taking a dark, little passage on his left he came out almost at once into a larger but less imposing court than those he had left behind. It was, in fact, like a small enclosed garden, for it had trees and shrubs and flowers, and in a centre-piece of grass there was an irregularly-shaped pool. A few feet from this pool there stood an animal, of a kind that he had never seen before. Its rounded shape and generous proportions (it stood about four feet from the ground), its thick, fine fur, black in some parts, white in others, its intelligent face and amiable expression, made it an unusually attractive creature. At this moment it was looking round inquiringly at a pretty little girl who was shoving it with all her might, both hands applied to its rump. The animal by the simple process of leaning backwards slightly put up a completely successful resistance; but every now and then — with the obvious desire to please — it would yield a few steps.

When the little girl saw Jali coming over the grass she politely ceased shoving and prepared to give him her attention. From a distance he had taken her for the daughter of one of the gardeners or grooms, for her dress was very simple and far from clean. But a nearer vision of her made him uncertain.

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'Tell me who you are,' he said, smiling.

'I'm Savitri.'

• 'And who is Savitri?'

She looked up into his face with a charming air of mockery. 'Savitri is Savitri.'

'Why, even I can tell you rather more than that. Savitri is a little girl of six, who . . .'

'Nearly eight.'

'Of nearly eight, who has an unusually nice animal, which . . .'

'He's not mine, and although he's nice he's very obstinate.'

'What do you want him to do?'

'I want to get him into the pool to wash him. He's very smelly. He needs a wash.' She hesitated. 'Would you mind helping me to shove?'

Jali had already noticed that the creature needed a wash. 'Couldn't we entice him to the fountain?' he suggested.

'I've already tried that. I put some bamboo shoots on the edge, and then when he went up and began eating them, I pushed him into the water — but only his hind legs; and he got out at once and went away.'

'Couldn't we try that again?'

She shook her head. 'It's no use. He's too clever. He guesses what would happen.'

Jali could not keep his eyes off her exquisite little face; she was the most charming child he had ever seen.

'Wouldn't you like to know who I am?' he essayed.

She saw through the ruse and laughed. 'No, not particularly. Why do you want so much to know who I am?'

'I really don't know.'

'I can see what you're like. You can see what I'm like.' She paused, and then, pointing to the animal who had turned his head round and was looking at them, 'And he can see what we're both like'.

Jali laughed, and then an idea struck him. 'Look here! If you'll tell me who you are, I'll help you to shove.'

'My mother is Damayanti, and my father is Mohan, and I live at Hawa Ghar.'

'Ah!' He stood still, studying her with even greater interest.

'Now shove!' said Savitri.

'In a moment. First tell me, is it nice at Hawa Ghar?'

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'Yes. Very.'

'And when are you going back?'

'To-morrow, thank goodness.'

Jali laughed. 'Why? Don't you like your Aunt Lakshmi? Don't you like being here?'

'Aunt Lakshmi is frightfully kind.' For the first time she showed a faint embarrassment. 'She always thinks of something like *that*' — and she prodded the animal with her bare foot — 'to amuse me. But I like being at home better — much, much better. — And now, shove!'

It had to be done, and Jali did his best. He shoved with all his strength, although secretly convinced that the creature could and would — either by sheer weight or by cunning — outmatch them. And, without ever for a moment losing its gentle, dignified amiability, the creature did.

On getting back to his rooms Jali picked up a book, but, try as he would, he could not keep his thoughts from wandering. His meeting with Savitri had turned them more particularly in the direction of Princess Damayanti. Searching in his memory for lights, it struck him that in Lakshmi's casual references to her there was always a faint implication that she and Mohan stood amusingly and eccentrically apart. Whenever Lakshmi and her friends — those intimate friends that were constantly in and out of the Palace — mentioned this couple, the gently ironic note, so characteristic of their talk, sounded a little more pronounced than usual. What did this mean? In a company where emphasis was avoided it might mean a good deal. But, on the other hand, the very smallest idiosyncrasies excited comment here, so that it might mean hardly anything.

The rest of the day passed slowly. Lakshmi's words had reminded him that this pleasant existence of his was not to last for ever. No! It was only an interlude. And nowhere else and never again would he enjoy just this sense of privileged seclusion. From the moment of entering through the great, heavy Palace door he had been lifted above all the fret, friction, and care of ordinary human life.

He awaited the evening with eagerness, but when the time came to dress a tiresome thing happened: his nose began to bleed. In vain he tried every remedy; the bleeding was persistent, and at last

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he was obliged to send a note to his hostess to say that he would be late. His annoyance at this mishap was aggravated, too, by his servants, who expatiated upon the wonders of the party that he was missing. Tansen, the greatest singer of all time, was going to sing the Moonlight Song, which had been composed ten years ago to this very day by Birbal, as he watched the rising of the moon in that very court.

For two hours Jali was held in ignominious inactivity; then suddenly the bleeding stopped. He looked out of the window. The moon had not yet risen! He would still be in time to watch the magic that had inspired Birbal.

With a servant walking in front to show him the way, and another following behind, he set out. After going down several corridors, and along the galleries of one or two courts that he already knew, he entered an unfamiliar wing and presently came to a door before which there stood a guard. He was about to enter the Ranee's own apartments. This region of the Palace was particularly luxurious; the taste shown seemed to him very good; and yet he found the effect as a whole rather chilling.

To his surprise he now had to mount several flights of stairs, and at last his guide stopped before a small, ivory-sheeted door, in the centre of which a silver lotus-flower was inlaid. The door was quietly opened to him by his attendants, who then stood aside to let him pass in alone. Before him was a short, dark passage, at the end of which glimmered the night-sky. Three or four steps took him out on to a balcony that overhung a large court. It was a court of a kind that he had not seen before, the far end being open; so that the eye, after travelling over the long stretch of marble, lost itself in the blue depths of emptiness beyond. In the semi-obscurity of the balcony the figures of his fellow-guests were just visible. They were sitting in silence, and this explained itself when all at once from below a soft, sweet voice, that seemed to belong to neither man nor woman, rose up and filled the night. A shiver ran down his spine; he leaned against a pillar, and closed his eyes.

For a while the voice rose and fell unaccompanied; then with extreme quietness a few stringed instruments and some small drums joined in. A soft, subtle pattern of sound was made, a pattern the complexity of which was strange and exciting; then the singer went on again alone.

When Jali opened his eyes, he noticed that the horizon was

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defining itself. Far beyond the pale terrace and the dark distances stretching away beneath it a light was welling up. It waxed, it threw open great spaces of the sky. Then the moon's rim appeared. A huge golden disc was rising exactly opposite, sending its rays along the lotus-pool that ran down the whole length of the court. The white lotus-flowers standing above the water cast their shadows upon it. Whiteness of flowers, darkness of shadows, glitter of water — this was the pattern to which the pattern of Tansen's music made echo.

When the song had ended silence lasted for a while. Then a murmur arose, and Lakshmi, turning her head, brought him to her side with a smile. 'You came just in time. I'm so glad. Where will you sit? That's Devi, although you may not know her in that head-dress. We're all dressed up — as you see — just as if the Emperor were here. Such a good plan — a really grand party, but for ourselves alone.'

Jali sat down beside Ranee Devi. She was flashing with jewels; indeed, the whole company, men and women, scintillated at every movement; but the moonlight made all the stones, excepting the diamonds, look dark, and the colours of the muslins and silks were lost too. Lakshmi was sitting in a silver chair. It was an ancient one from Mongolia, the rarest, as the Rajah had once mentioned, of all his possessions. Alone the Dalai Lama possessed a similar one.

After a brief interval someone below clapped his hands for silence, and then again the strange voice rose up. But this time, in dread of the moment when the song would end and it would become necessary to make conversation, Jali checked his emotion and deliberately looked about him. The court was terraced in very broad, shallow steps that went down to the long pool in the centre. On both sides the walls were windowless and almost without ornament. The balcony, on the other hand, was elaborately carved. White marble and ivory had been wrought together, with an inlay of some stone that was dark, but had a crystalline sparkle in the moonlight.

Of the eight people gathered on the balcony only two were difficult to see, and, as luck would have it, one of these was Princess Damayanti. The shadow of a pillar fell across her, and in addition she was turned away from him. A slender arm, a lovely foot and ankle, were all that he could see with any distinctness, but they helped him to build up his picture of her — a picture of quickness,

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lightness, and spontaneity. 'Yes, this is what Savitri's mother would be like!' he thought. 'And she has the same quick, eager utterance too.' The Princess was talking to the husband of Devi, Rajah Narayan, a man whom Jali was inclined to dislike. 'Can she really enjoy talking to Narayan?' he asked himself, and it seemed to him most important that she should not.

After singing two or three more songs Tansen rose and with his musicians walked out into full view. There they stood for a moment in silence, then bowed three times and withdrew.

'A funny little man!' commented Ranee Devi in her off-hand way. 'He's always like that. He won't come and be friendly. But, after all, why should he? If he doesn't like us . . .' And she shrugged.

All agreed that Tansen had never sung better. 'Of course,' exclaimed Ranee Maya, 'he's at his best here, where the setting is so perfect.'

Jali moved to the speaker's side (thus getting a step nearer to Damayanti). She was a beautiful, languid, young woman whose voice and manner contrasted pleasantly with Ranee Devi's. Leaning towards him with a little head-shake, she said: 'I'm afraid poor darling Lakshmi is having one of her headaches to-night. Isn't it too sad!'

'Does she have headaches?'

Ranee Maya gave him a look of surprise. 'The most terrible headaches! She has had them ever since that affair with her brother.' And then, seeing him at a loss, she went on to describe how Prince Akas, who was a hashisch addict, became very violent at times, and had once thrown his sister down a flight of steps. Jali was horrified.

'Oh yes! In one way and another, she has had, you know, a most tragic life — such a lot of unhappiness.'

Jali looked at her inquiringly. It was odd, he reflected, how completely he lacked the gift of picking up information. 'Please tell me,' he said. 'I know nothing.'

The Ranee gave a sigh. 'Well, to begin with, there's her mother . . .'

'Her mother?'

'Yes. The Ranee Indrami, who lives here with them, you know . . .'

'In this Palace?'

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'Yes. And she's quite mad. I daresay you've heard her . . . She imitates the noise of the peacocks — and the crocodile! Lakshmi was afraid she might insist on being here to-night. Very often she behaves quite reasonably all through the evening until the very end, and then says or does something dreadful. It's very hard — hard on poor Bhoj, too.'

Jali was lost in astonishment. 'To think that I have been here all this time, and yet . . . But please tell me more.'

'Lakshmi's courage is wonderful. In her place I should feel that the gods had a grudge against me. Two of her brothers died quite suddenly in accidents, and then — oh well, never a year passes without her losing one of her closest friends. I suppose Randhir will be the next to go.'

'Rajah Randhir?' exclaimed Jali. 'But why?'

He gave a glance at the Rajah, who was leaning against the pillar opposite. There was a smile on his handsome face as he bent forward, talking to Lakshmi. But now again, as often before, it seemed to Jali that the Rajah's spirit was far away.

His question remained unanswered, because at that moment there was a general stir. This he welcomed, for now, surely, Lakshmi would not omit to introduce him to Damayanti. But she did nothing, and before he could summon the courage to take the matter into his own hands, Randhir had sat himself down at Damayanti's side, and there was nothing to be done.

For Jali the party now began to be exceedingly wearisome. Rajah Narayan was a great talker with an inexhaustible fund of gossip. It mattered nothing to him that dawn was not far off, and that for some time already Lakshmi had been looking very tired. Or perhaps, to do him justice, he guessed that his hostess could endure anything better than that her party should draw to too early a close. Anyhow, the flow of his small, uncharitable anecdotes went on and on, and as Jali listened to him his dislike rose and spilt over on to the world of which the man formed a part. Early in life, he reflected, this big, burly fellow had been shrewd enough to suspect that good birth, a good digestion, and an easy, if somewhat arrogant, manner could be relied on to bring him everything he wanted. And the world had proved him right.

A little later, when Ranee Maya made a tentative effort to say good night, Jali's heart leapt up, but he had counted without Lakshmi. Miraculously shaking off every sign of fatigue, she

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implored her guests not to go yet. This gave Narayan a further opportunity, which he was not slow to take.

But with Maya, Damayanti had also risen, and the young man now saw her move towards a narrow flight of steps which evidently led down into the court. These steps had escaped his notice, and never had it occurred to him that the court was within his reach. The lotus-pool below had seemed to belong to a quite inaccessible world. With eagerness and delight he sprang up and went after her; he followed her right up to the edge of the pool.

Lilies and lotuses, thin grasses and calm water — what a wonderful, small, separate world lay there in a trance! Dropping upon his knees, he bent down towards the lotus-flowers, which, balanced on slender stalks three inches above the surface, caught the moonlight on the waxy whiteness of their cups. They shone like lamps of alabaster, their crystalline texture becoming visible where the moon glanced upon the petals' curves. To look along the whole length of the pool from this level was to wander in a miniature forest of enormous blooms. It had its glades and avenues, upon the glassy floor of which skating insects weaved an intricate dance. Tiny were the ripples that they made, but at moments a deep undulation ran across the water, revealing the hidden movement of a fish.

When he rose to his feet again Damayanti was no longer there. He had a moment's dismay, until he saw her standing at the end of the court, where it overhung the blue spaces of the night. Once more he followed and leaning upon the balustrade beside her looked down over the flat roofs of the town, which were dim under slanting veils of milky smoke. She turned her head and gave him a smile, but the silence between them remained unbroken, nor did he feel it necessary to speak.

'The last time I was here,' she said at last, 'such an odd thing happened. A fish suddenly jumped out of the pool and lay flapping on the rim. It flapped, then lay still, then flapped again. And after a moment a great heavy bird came sailing over that roof. It dropped down on the ground near the fish, and picked it up and swallowed it. Then it rose again on its big, ragged wings and sailed heavily back over the roof again.'

While she was speaking Jali stared at her with a deep but remote attention. 'Yes, that certainly was very odd. It must have seemed as if the fish . . .'

'Had made an appointment with the bird. It did seem like that.'



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They both laughed, and then, of a sudden, Jali was seized with shyness. They had straightened themselves and were standing and looking at one another. The young man now turned his head away. He was longing to see what she was really like, but the moonlight, although strong, revealed none of the things that he most wanted to see. It depersonalized her; it robbed her of all the natural colours of life. Her expression was indiscernible, even her features were disguised.

Saying, 'It's time for Mohan and me to go,' she began to walk back across the court. 'We have to make an early start for Hawa Ghar to-morrow morning.'

Jali felt acutely disappointed. 'Wait a minute!' he wanted to cry out; but what he would have said after that he had no idea. In helpless silence he moved along by her side.

'You know the Guru, don't you?' She spoke almost as if she were thinking aloud. 'I was hoping he would be here to-night.'

He felt these words to be the opening of a door, but he also felt powerless to step through it. While he was making some empty, stammering reply they reached the balcony steps. Glancing upwards, he saw that everyone was now moving. The party was breaking up; the evening was over.

WHAT Ranee Maya had told him about Lakshmi filled Jali's mind with wonder and greatly increased his admiration of her. That she was a charming, intelligent, and cultivated woman anyone could see, but who could have guessed that she was so much more? She gave the impression of having always lived a life of careless ease, and the few allusions to past adversity that she allowed herself to drop were so light that they disguised rather than revealed the extent of her misfortunes. He was grateful to Ranee Maya for having thrown this light upon her ill-starred life.

For a day or two after the party she remained in her own wing of the Palace, and he learnt from the Rajah that she was suffering from a persistent headache. Deprived of his daily talks, he began to find time hang heavy on his hands.

It was with a shock of pleasure that he came upon her one morning again in her usual place. The court was filled with a cool, clear sunshine that reminded him of their first meeting. Her blue eyes, too, were filled with the same dreamy emptiness, the white doves were cooing and the fountain murmuring just as before, and the same scent of roses and jasmine hung in the still air.

There was, however, one particular in which the scene was entirely different. In her dress she struck an unfamiliar note. She was wearing a homely sari of yellow muslin, and her bangles and sandals were of a simplicity to match. She might have been any little housewife going out for a morning's shopping.

'And that's just what I'm going to do,' she said when he had made his laughing comment. 'Every now and then I go down to the bazaar, and wander about, and find new friends. I simply love it. — You know —' and she made a little gesture, which took in everything, 'you know, one gets so tired of one's own small corner in life! Other surroundings, other people, are sometimes such a relief.'

Jali nodded.

'So I'm going down to the bazaar, and I want you to meet me there.' She was now leaning forward and smiling at him gaily. 'We'll stroll about for an hour or so, and have some real fun. In this dress I can go anywhere without anyone recognizing me. Come

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to the fruit-seller Rama Tej at the corner. His wife is a special friend of mine — and still without the faintest idea who I am!’

At the appointed hour Jali arrived. He, too, had put on sober clothes for the occasion, but Rama Tej had evidently been told to look out for him, for he ran forward, smiling and bowing, and rubbing his hands. ‘My Lord!’ he exclaimed in a loud, confidential whisper: ‘My Lord, the Ranee is here! Yes, the light of her presence is shining in my house!’ And he pointed to his own private quarters behind the shop.

‘But I thought you didn’t know who she was.’

‘Oh, I know — but not my wife. My wife is an invalid; she never comes out from her room. She wonders: “Who is this kind lady who comes to me?” But one day she shall know — and then — what a surprise, what joy! The fame of it will spread abroad. And all who hear will say: “Isn’t that just like our Ranee!”’

He was a charming little man, thought Jali, so round and smooth that he looked like one of his own pumpkins. Vegetables and fruits of all kind lay about, sending a sweet, country smell up into the air. As they were chatting together Lakshmi came out. ‘Now be careful!’ she warned Rama Tej as he hurried up to her. ‘You must treat me like everybody else, or your neighbours will begin to suspect.’

‘How nice all these people are!’ she went on, as they wandered down the bazaar. ‘It’s such a mistake to think that one has to look grand in order to be treated nicely. If you show people that you like them and believe them to be honest — why, then they become what you think. One day, as I was walking along like this, I suddenly noticed that I had kept on a pearl necklace by mistake, and as I was taking it off the string broke. My jeweller was at the other end of the town, and I was in a hurry, so I just gave the pearls to a water-carrier who was passing by and said: “Will you take these to the jeweller Takhu for me? He will recognize whose pearls they are, and give you a few pice for your pains.” And of course twenty minutes later the pearls were all there.’

Jali smiled and nodded, but the next moment a thought struck him, and he said: ‘But what would have happened to the man, if he hadn’t . . .?’

There was no reply, for at that instant, in order to avoid recognition, Lakshmi had to dive into a shop. In the strange jumble of things for sale here, he noticed some toys, and his thoughts turned to Savitri. Looking round at Lakshmi, he exclaimed: ‘By the way,

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I haven't yet told you of an adventure of mine in the Palace the other day.' And he described the meeting.

She listened with a far-away smile, and he received the impression that he had been speaking with an animation which she thought rather silly. 'For a little girl of that age,' he concluded half apologetically, 'she seemed to me quite enchanting.'

All at once Lakshmi's expression completely changed. 'Yes, isn't she delightful!' Her voice was vibrant with enthusiasm. 'Darling little Savitri! I do wish she came to us more often. That delicious naturalness of hers! That unselfconsciousness! It wrings one's heart to think that little by little it will be rubbed off.' She gave a sigh and stopped short, looking at him with eyes wide open and sad. 'Do you know, all women, I think, have a kind of nostalgia for their childhood.'

After this a certain sadness clung to her for several minutes, but suddenly the cloud lifted, and on their return journey together in her palanquin, she became unusually gay. They chatted and laughed in an intimacy which he found more delightful every moment. And when they got home she asked him to help her to make up a party — a small and intimate party for Ranee Maya's birthday. 'We'll ask the Guru,' she said. 'I don't know how it is that we haven't asked him here lately. He usually comes quite often. Yes, let me see, we'll have . . .'

Sitting over the list of names with her was most amusing, for she had something witty to say about everyone. Now and then he would make a suggestion, but only to draw upon himself a stare of mock horror. 'Ananda Singh with Devi! — my dear, the room would be a shambles. Don't you know . . .?' And the story that followed was always exceedingly funny. Seeing Pundit Mahk Murri's name down as that of a distinguished visitor to the town, he was very eager that the Pundit should be asked. 'No, not for *that* party,' Lakshmi replied firmly, 'because we already have the Guru and Pundit Lal Mehta. This is to be a party, you must remember, not a conference. In fact, if we have the Guru, we ought also, I think, to have Narayan as a balance. Do you see what I mean?'

With Rajah Bhoj, too, Jali was now on terms of flattering intimacy, and the Rajah, like Lakshmi, had risen in his esteem. Fineness of fibre he had always allowed him; what he now perceived was that the Rajah's limitations were much less cramping

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than he had at first supposed. They didn't prevent him from being a shrewd judge of character or from using considerable astuteness in his dealings with his fellow-men. Sometimes, indeed, Jali had found himself wondering whether his host were not rather cynical. For instance: 'We of the governing class,' the Rajah had once smilingly observed, 'have the art of unobtrusively retaining a firm hold on our own. It is often possible to keep the substance while giving away the shadow.'

His cynicism, however, — if cynicism it was — did not prevent Rajah Bhoj from being a conscientious and, to all appearances, a sagacious ruler. He certainly had a keen sense of the responsibilities attaching to his position. 'To rule,' he would say, 'is more than a calling, it is a gift.' And he would impress upon Jali the fact that he and the Ranee were exercising gifts which were rare, for they belonged exclusively to the ruling class.

So insistent was he upon this that Jali had to assent. 'Yes,' he would say, 'Yes, I see!' But he also saw (without thinking it necessary to say so) that in return for what they did and what they were, Bhoj and Lakshmi received rewards that were not by any means to be despised. He wasn't thinking of the Rajah's great wealth (which, after all, was merely a convenience), nor of the honours due to rank (for those remained rather tiresome even when you were well accustomed to them); what he had in mind was the profound self-esteem, the deep sense of one's inward worth, that accompanied the Rajah's way of thinking. These the young man felt to be truly enviable blessings, and he went so far as to consider whether he, too, might not make a fine ruler. For the first time in his life he indulged in day-dreams in which he imagined himself occupying his father's throne and demonstrating to the world that he stood second to none — not even to Bhoj himself! — in benevolent sagacity. Nor should his chosen Ranee be wanting in any of Lakshmi's graces.

The trouble was that his mind swung over from one way of thinking to another half a dozen times in the course of the day. For these day-dreams ran counter to another current of feeling, and the harder he tried to identify himself with his new friends the further he was from securing inward peace. Sometimes, when he thought of home, it was to picture himself impressing his father and mother with his newly-acquired knowledge of the world; but there were other times — and these were becoming more frequent — when, trans-

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porting his father and mother in imagination to Daulatpur, he looked at the Palace through their eyes. And the result was disconcerting.

Nor did this account for the whole of the conflict within him. During all these days there abided at the back of his mind a vivid recollection of the Guru's dell. His visits there, which had always been short, were becoming less frequent. Truth to tell, he had found that he was unable to pass with any comfort from the atmosphere of the Palace to that of the dell and back again. With his mind attuned to the Palace he went to the dell unwillingly, conscious that he was going to give a false picture of himself; and on his return to the Palace he would feel awkward and even alien until the effect of the dell had worn off. It irritated him, it puzzled and troubled him, to feel that Lakshmi, while giving the Guru much affection and respect, did not reserve for him any special place in her esteem. When he talked to her about the Guru (which he rarely did), she was apt to show a flippancy that made him angry. On the other hand, in conversation with the Guru he himself was apt to be pompous or to parade a humorously disabused attitude to life which was borrowed from Lakshmi.

One morning, as he was riding to the dell, he noticed several columns of smoke going up from a village about three miles away. The groom who was with him said it was a settlement of outcasts, and agreed that by all appearances the village had been intentionally fired; however, he added, no doubt the vile creatures living there richly deserved their punishment. Jali made no reply, but, as he rode on, he was troubled. The Guru had recently been talking about the harsh treatment received by this folk from their better-born neighbours, the latter being, apparently, seized at intervals with a wanton impulse to inflict pain.

After a few moments he said: 'I am going to see what is being done over there.'

The groom looked surprised. In the tone of one remonstrating with a child, he replied: 'My Lord! It is a village of outcasts! The sight of it would only offend your compassionate eye.'

Jali flushed with sudden anger. 'Follow me! I am going to see what is happening.'

A spirit of opposition appeared in the groom. 'I cannot disobey your orders, My Lord, but in that village defilement awaits us. And, as the saying goes . . .'

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'Enough!' cried Jali. 'Your business is to follow me.' And with that he turned off the path, taking a straight line to the village without regard for the crops.

'My Lord! My Lord!' exclaimed the groom in a voice of dismay.

Jali rode on, but his anger, swift to flare up, as quickly subsided. He now saw that trouble lay ahead, for some peasants were already running towards him with protesting cries. On observing that he was a person of consequence, however, they halted, and their protests died away. But this did nothing to make Jali feel better pleased with himself; he beckoned them to him and threw several coins on the ground. Seeing themselves amply compensated for the damage to their crops, the men changed their tone; they now pressed forward with obsequious smiles. Yes, the village had been fired. The wretched outcasts had been well beaten. It would give them a lesson.

'What did they do to deserve punishment?'

The men looked at one another. Nobody knew. At last the spokesman said: 'It is not we but the men of Manabad who were offended by them. And it is the men of Tanaman who have done the punishing.'

'Why that?'

'The men of Tanaman are Mōhammedans. They don't mind being defiled.'

Jali was silent. The circle of empty grinning faces filled him with a sense of futility. Suddenly someone pointed to a lonely figure hoeing in a neighbouring field. 'That's Panat from Manabad. Panat will know why the outcasts have been beaten. Ohe! Panat! Panat!' And from a dozen throats there went up a loud cry.

Panat, startled, came forward with the air of a dog expecting the stick.

'Tell me,' said Jali, 'what grievances have you men of Manabad against those outcasts?'

The man laughed, turned round to stare at the burning village, and laughed again.

'Have you any grievance at all?' insisted Jali.

'Oh yes, Maharajah, of course we have a grievance. Why else should we punish them?'

There was a silence. The men looked at one another; they saw that the Maharajah was irritated and that something must be done. So they pressed about Panat, and a loud discussion arose. After a

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minute a spokesman stepped forward, his face beaming with eagerness to oblige. 'The dogs yonder have again defiled the stream. They steal down under cover of darkness to draw water. That is why they are being punished. And well they deserve it.'

Jali's reply was a look of weary disgust. He felt pretty sure that the well in the village had run dry. But what was the use of arguing? It was in his mind to turn back to the bridle-path and continue on his way without further ado.

Observing his indecision, the groom now spoke up in a complacent voice. 'My Lord is satisfied, I trust? Will he deign to return to the proper road?'

Without answering, Jali jerked at his reins and went on until he reached the village. Only a few of the huts had been burnt, the others having escaped owing to the absence of wind. But the dirt, squalor, and destitution were beyond belief. Before these wretched homes, men, women, and children were standing about apathetically; it was evident that they were without the spirit to resume the business of living. Riding past them, he came to a group in which something seemed to be going on, and, looking down over the heads of the crowd, he saw a little old man kneeling beside one of those who had received a beating. The back of the victim showed fearful lacerations, and others in the same plight were squatting near by, awaiting their turn for treatment.

Wishing to help, but not knowing what to do, Jali looked on in silence, and presently he received a shock of surprise — of surprise not unmixed with horror. For, as the kneeling man stretched out an arm, his torn garment slipped from him and revealed weals, as yet untreated, that were hardly less severe than those he was attending to. It was not until the man looked up to beckon to his next patient that Jali recognized the Guru.

A couple of hours later, when with Jali's help the Guru had come to the end of his labours, the two sat down to take rest in the shade of one of the huts. Jali had already done all that he could for the weals on the Guru's back; but that was not much; and he marvelled at the old man's stoicism.

It was now midday. The smells that rose up on all sides were abominable, the air was thick with flies. Seeing that his companion had sunk into thought, Jali remained silent; but he could not help hoping that the Guru would soon suggest that they should make



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their way to the dell, where they could wash themselves and quench their thirst.

Presently the Guru began to explain what was on his mind. As soon as it became known in the surrounding villages that he had been beaten by the Mohammedans of Tanaman trouble was likely to arise. Reprisals and counter-reprisals threatened; and all this owing to what was really no more than a mistake, for the men of Tanaman were not by any means ill-disposed towards him; they were merely rather hot-headed. 'Something must be done,' the Guru concluded with a rueful smile, 'or else the Palace people will be saying once again that I do more harm than good. I think you must lend me one of your horses. I ought to lose no time in visiting the villages and making my explanations. That's the only way to prevent trouble.'

'But . . .' began Jali, and then stopped, for the other was already crawling painfully to his feet.

Jali got up and looked at the Guru with wonder. 'I should like to come with you,' he said.

The ride continued all day. Fortunately, the villages were not far apart, so that relief from the sun was obtainable at intervals; but for the Guru, who was engaged in talk with the villagers, the time spent at the halting-places was by no means restful. Jali followed, and as he watched his wonder increased.

When at last the time came to part the sun was very near setting. The Guru had drawn up not far from a small knoll on which stood a group of trees — tall, thin acacias, very noticeable in this treeless landscape — about two miles from the village of outcasts, and an equal distance from the dell. Having dismounted, he put his reins into Jali's hands, saying that from here he would make his way home on foot. At first Jali protested, unable to understand why his companion was unwilling to make use of his mount for the remainder of the way. But the Guru was firm. 'It's late. And the people at the Palace will be wondering what has become of you. When you get there, make as little as possible of to-day's happenings. In a case like this the less said the better.'

It was on these words that they parted, and Jali, sitting still on his horse, watched the small figure limping away towards the group of trees. The sun was pouring its low, red light across the plain; it flushed the Guru's dirty, tattered garments and stretched

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his shadow out over the rich brown of the earth. For two or three minutes Jali's eyes followed him in a gaze of profound abstraction. Then he turned his horse's head in the direction of the town and rode on. Not long ago the Guru had told him that the hour of sunset was his hour for prayer, and that some places seemed to him to possess a specially benign influence. So now it was clear why the Guru had dismounted, why he had wished to be alone, and why he had set out towards that lonely clump of trees.

Sadly Jali rode on. In all the wide landscape there was not a human being to be seen, for the peasants had gone home to their villages. The town of Daulatpur with its palace set high in the middle of it stood out dark against the luminous green of the northern sky. It was an empty scene, thought Jali, and an hour in which it was easy to feel desolate; but in his mind's eye he saw the Guru moving towards his place of prayer, and that *he* did not feel desolate was very sure.

THAT night Jali slept badly and woke with so severe a headache that he was obliged to send for the Palace doctor, who at once pronounced him to be suffering from a mild sunstroke and ordered that he should remain in a darkened room for several days. This pronouncement was welcome to him, for he had no wish for company.

At dinner, the evening before, he had explained his long day's absence from the Palace as simply as he could; but the Rajah had evidently heard something already, for he threw a glance at Lakshmi, and she, instead of asking questions, looked down at her plate with a faint smile. It was a smile that played most delicately about the corners of her lovely mouth, and it had often charmed Jali, but on this occasion it excited him to anger — an anger which he had the greatest difficulty in concealing at the time, and could not get rid of, for he woke up with it. As he lay in bed, unkindly thoughts of Bhoj and Lakshmi, and of the whole of the Palace world, continued to occupy his mind. It was all very well for Bhoj to make so much of himself and his friends as exponents of the art of living, upholders of culture, and defenders of a high tradition in conduct and in manners; it was all very well, *but* . . . Here he broke off, for, although that 'but' seemed to him to be enormous, his head ached too much for him to determine, even roughly, what it stood for.

In the afternoon a messenger whom he had dispatched to his mother a fortnight ago returned with the unpleasant news that it had been impossible to find a way through Salim's lines. The man's report made it clear that the civil war was spreading and causing terrible misery. Moreover, what he had to say about the famine and the cholera was far from reassuring.

He was still reflecting gloomily upon these tidings when a servant announced that the Rajah was at the door. His visitor was in very good spirits. For a while he chatted amiably about this and that, then came out with the news that he and Lakshmi had accepted an invitation from the Sesodia, which would cause them to set out on their round of visits a little earlier than they had expected. 'But this change of plans,' he added, 'doesn't affect the arrangements

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that Lakshmi has made for you. Maya will be delighted to take you in at any time.'

After the Rajah had gone Jali lay back in bed, and reflected how much rather he would have gone to stay with Mohan and Damayanti. A sudden wave of unhappiness swept over him. Its violence was astonishing; for he could find no adequate cause. For a long time he lay still, struggling to discover what was the matter. At last he said to himself: 'The trouble is that I have no settled standard of values.' And hard upon this came the thought that there was something wrong about his reluctance to lay his perplexities before the Guru.

He was haunted by the eyes of the Guru. Those eyes were remarkable — or rather it was their gaze that was remarkable. It was a gaze of such extraordinary candour. In contrast with it every other gaze seemed veiled and furtive, half-afraid and half-challenging. But it was not the gaze of a child; there was mature intelligence, there was understanding, behind it.

Three days later, having by this time recovered, he took his horse and set out for the dell. It was early morning; the fields were giving out a damp, sweet-scented breath; after his confinement indoors he took special pleasure in the light, the air, the wide spaces of the sky.

On reaching the dell he dismounted, tied his horse to the rail and looked down. The Guru was standing by the well with the monkey on the grass at his feet. He had dipped a cup into the water, and, while he was drinking, the monkey caught sight of the figure at the top of the cliff. It put out a hand and plucked at the Guru's robe to attract his attention; then, as Jali began to come down the steps, it scurried away to take up its position on the roof of the house.

'Well!' The Guru came forward with a smile of welcome. 'You have completely recovered, I see. That's good.'

He looked really glad, and as they strolled up to the well together and stood there talking, Jali felt the Guru's friendliness playing upon his spirit with a reviving warmth. But at the same time he was filled with self-dislike, for during these last days he had deliberately taken refuge in coldness and dryness of heart.

Picking up the goblet from which the Guru had been drinking, 'What a beautiful cup?' he exclaimed. 'I haven't seen it before.'

'No? The Emperor sent it to me after his visit here.'

Jali turned the cup over in his hand. It was carved out of a single

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piece of the finest white jade. A three-legged toad looking over the rim formed the handle.

'Do you know the legend of the three-legged toad?' the Guru went on. 'The philosopher Pi-Fu one day committed a fault, and God, looking down from Heaven, laughed and said to him: "In your well there is a three-legged toad. I command you to fish for him every day until you succeed in bringing him up." The philosopher spent many weary days by the well, until at last he sat down to think. "My fault," he said to himself, "came from the love of money; the love of money makes a man walk crookedly; the three-legged toad must of necessity walk crookedly; perhaps he is afflicted as I was." So he let down into the well a coin, and sure enough up came the three-legged toad clinging tight to the coin. Then a peal of laughter came down from Heaven and the philosopher was once more a free man.'

'That is a very nice story. I wonder if the Emperor knows it.'

'He didn't know it, but I told it him.'

'I am surprised at your daring to tell him. Hari says that his avarice is extraordinary.'

'Oh, the Emperor doesn't think of himself as caring about money. No one does.'

Jali laughed. 'Do you like Akbar?' he asked.

'Yes, I do. Although something of a ruffian, he's really quite a nice man. But of course it's not easy to be a nice emperor; in fact, practically impossible, I should say.'

Jali laughed again. 'I should find it very difficult to be any kind of emperor.' He paused, hesitating. 'But then I have always felt particularly unfitted for public life. It has worried me . . . especially since my father's disablement . . . because it now looks as if I might have to step into his position as head of the State fairly soon.'

'Come and sit down,' said the Guru, and he moved towards the trees where some rugs were spread under the shade. 'In my opinion you will make an excellent Rajah . . . if you don't take your position too seriously.'

Jali was surprised. 'There are plenty of Rajahs in this country who don't, and *they* . . .'

'Ah, but they are not very nice men to begin with. That's the trouble.'

Jali felt pleased, but also slightly piqued. Rajah Bhoj, when he talked to him about his future responsibilities, used quite another

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tone — a tone which, because more serious, was actually more flattering. After looking down at the ground for a moment, he said: 'A little time ago I had almost made up my mind to refuse to succeed to my father. But the Rajah has persuaded me that I have no right to do that. He pointed out that people in our position have grave responsibilities — which they ought not to shirk.'

The Guru smiled broadly. 'Well, as I have already said, I'm sure you'll make an excellent Rajah — especially if you don't think of yourself as one.'

Jali paused. Surely Rajah Bhoj thought of himself as one all the time? Cautiously he replied: 'I wonder what would happen if the Emperor were to give up thinking of himself as an emperor.'

'Who knows? It might work very well. And, anyhow, you aren't the Emperor. After all, Vidyapur is quite a small State. You can act as your own spirit moves you, and no one outside will interfere — although one or two people might make fun of you. That's always liable to happen.'

'In any case,' returned Jali stiffly, 'I shall do my best. Since coming here I have learnt a good deal. Rajah Bhoj and the Ranee set an example which anyone . . .'

'Oh, I think you ought to do better than that.'

'Better? Do you mean to say . . .?' And Jali broke off with raised eyebrows.

The Guru laughed — but his laugh was disarming — and he put out a deprecatory hand. 'Don't misunderstand me! I have the greatest liking and respect for the Rajah and his wife. But why should you want to *imitate* them — or anybody? After all, you are young. The world is changing pretty rapidly; it's your own life that you will have to live, and in your own world. Don't complicate things for yourself by trying to be, or by pretending to be, what you *are* not.'

Jali, startled, was silent for a moment, then he burst out: 'I don't know what I am.'

'You know well enough what you are not.'

This was so true that Jali could find no reply. For a moment he frowned, then, raising his eyes, met a smile that was so humorous and friendly that he could not but return it. While he was hesitating, uncertain what to say, Mahabir stepped out of the house and came towards them. The Guru got up. 'This means that Hari wants me. But I shall not be more than a few minutes.'

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Jali looked after the departing figure with a frown of perplexity. He had been slightly put out, but he also felt less cold and dry. Were there possibilities in himself and in the world that he was ignoring? Possibilities of simple fellowship that one was tempted to deny because . . . ? He wondered, and as he wondered self-mistrust returned. The Guru had urged him to follow his own instincts, but did the Guru know how unstable a character he possessed? Unstable? Yes, if the dangerous faculty of looking at life from half a dozen different angles was to be called instability. The Guru, he feared, was one-idea'd, one-sided, and without any real experience of the great world. No doubt he was superior to Bhoj and Lakshmi in one way, but . . .

When the Guru came back Jali gave him no time to pick up the conversation where it had been left; he began by inquiring after Hari, then went on to discuss the cholera epidemic and the civil war, and finally mentioned his approaching visit to Ranee Maya.

'Oh! So you are going there!' The Guru nodded reflectively. 'I was rather hoping you would go to stay with Mohan and Damayanti.'

Jali knew this; on their long ride together the Guru had already spoken about it, saying how fond he was of both the Prince and Princess, and of little Savitri as well. For a moment the young man hesitated. 'I should have liked to go to them,' he answered, 'but — this other arrangement had already been made.'

'Damayanti did send you an invitation?'

Jali paused, then said: 'Yes, but it came too late.'

There was a silence in which he reflected uncomfortably that with a little more courage he could easily have asked Lakshmi to alter her arrangements. Ranee Maya's feelings would certainly not have been hurt. The trouble was that, for some reason or other, he had not dared to tell Lakshmi where his preference lay.

The Guru was looking thoughtful. 'Please don't think me interfering,' he said at last, 'but the fact is that I had a visit from Damayanti not long after her meeting with you in the Court of the Silver Lotus, and she told me how much she and Mohan would like to have you at Hawa Ghar.' He waited a moment, and then, as Jali made no reply, went on in another voice: 'Didn't you enjoy Tansen's singing? I think it wonderful, and am very sorry to have missed it.'

'Lakshmi told me that she had asked you. I wonder why you didn't come.'

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'Well! I had a kind of presentiment which turned out to be justified.'

'Oh! How was that?'

'It was the night of the full moon, you remember. And when the moon is full the Emperor rarely sleeps. On that night he sat up — as he frequently does — transacting business until dawn. But in the midst of his business he sent for me. He wanted me to interpret a dream of his — an old, recurrent dream.'

'What was it?'

The Guru did not answer at once. He was staring before him thoughtfully. Then he said: 'Have you ever seen Akbar?'

'Yes, once. At the Durbar.' A picture of the Emperor rose up in Jali's memory. He remembered a man of middle-height, immensely broad and vigorous-looking. Not swarthy, but deeply tanned, with little eyes that sparkled, and a habit of curious immobility, which was, however, broken by quick movements of the head or hands, movements of an animal alertness.

'He was not looking at all well that night,' the Guru went on. 'There were pouches under his eyes, and he was perspiring a great deal, although it was rather cool in the tent.'

'You saw him in his big tent?'

'Yes. I was woken up by his messenger — it must have been about three hours after midnight.'

Without knowing quite why, Jali said: 'Tansen had finished, and I had gone down into the court. I was looking out over the plain.'

'Perhaps you saw Akbar's tent — a white patch outside the southern gate?'

Jali shook his head.

'Inside the big tent there is a smaller one, and another inside that. The innermost is small, and shaped like a circular brick-kiln. It has an opening at the top through which one sees the sky. Akbar was sitting as usual cross-legged on a low dais, but with no canopy over him. Todar Mal, his Commander-in-Chief, was at a small table in front, which was covered with maps and papers. There were some scribes in the background. No one was speaking when I came in; Akbar motioned me to a seat near the door and there I waited.

'He was receiving reports. People were brought in, one after another, questioned, and dismissed. They were of all kinds — provincial governors, soldiers, tax-collectors, and so on. A few had come back from missions to foreign lands. Part of the time old



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Todar Mal was able to doze. When unsatisfactory reports came in I saw him glancing apprehensively at Akbar who certainly did look pretty formidable, sitting there heavy and motionless with sleepy eyelids, but making sudden violent movements and barking out unexpected questions. But even so, Todar Mal was so tired that at times he yawned. You see, Akbar sleeps very little, and at odd hours. Often he works the whole night long.

'Then suddenly all this business came to an end. The scribes vanished; Todar Mal, his eyes half closed, shuffled out too. Akbar beckoned to me, and while eating some sliced mangoes that had been brought in, told me his dream. He evidently thought it might have some prophetic meaning, but I pointed out that as he had had it at intervals for many years, there was no reason why he should attach special importance to it now. He paid no attention to me, however.'

'What was the dream?'

'He dreamt that he was lying half-asleep under a tree, and that every now and then some branch of the tree would turn into a snake and bend down to bite him; but in his sleep and without any trouble he would make a cut with his sword and sever the creature's head from its body. The obvious interpretation would seem to be that he was well able to deal with treacheries and insurrections — in particular those of his sons.'

'Did you say that?'

'No. Something checked me, and I was afterwards glad. For after he had drunk a few glasses of wine he told me something more. A short while ago he had dreamt a sequel to his dream. He had dreamt that he caused this tree of his to be transplanted into the Court of his Palace at Lahore; and that he was very proud of it, and showed it off to all his friends, and to the ambassadors who visited him. Then gradually a suspicion came into his mind that the tree did him no credit; he noticed that the admiration of his guests was forced; he caught them looking down their noses, and whispering behind his back. At last he observed that the tree instead of growing was actually becoming smaller every day. And about this he did not know whether to be discomfited or pleased.' The Guru paused. 'A very uncomfortable dream for the poor old man! I felt that this was a case that called for great discretion. Taking my time, I pretended to give the dream deep consideration and to come at last to the conclusion that it was completely negligible.'

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Jali, who had been listening with attention, laughed at this conclusion; but his laugh ended abruptly, and he said nothing.

'As you can imagine,' the Guru went on, 'I should have liked to give him some comfort. But what was there to say? I cannot think — even now. And on that particular night I was strangely affected by him. I was dazed. I felt as if I were standing by a great, silent, muddy, rushing river in flood. And this feeling grew on me every minute. We stared at one another in silence. I could think of nothing to say. At last, instead of giving me my dismissal, he motioned me back to my seat. Again I waited while he transacted business. This time it was more important business — the progress of Salim's armies, the cholera, the secret, underground stirrings of the masses — these were the subjects under consideration. In all this he was dealing with human beings numbered by the million, and I became strangely aware of the heaving and straining of these multitudes that seemed to build up huge, half-conscious demi-urges driving the world forward on a dark, tortuous way. It was as if there were an affinity between Akbar and those collective beings that are ourselves in the mass. But, for all that, I felt that his time was past. I felt him to be lost — left astern by Time; yet perhaps not wholly lost, not wholly helpless . . . There may still be something that he can do.

'At last, when he had finished and everyone had been sent away, he called me to him again, and after waiting for a moment to see if I had anything to add, made a gesture of dismissal.

'I went out into the dawn feeling heavy — heavy in heart and mind — and in body, too. But as I walked back over the fields in the beautiful, glowing light, Spirit flowed into me again. My void was filled with thankfulness, for I knew again that behind life — its source and its guide — there is Spirit.'

After staring before him in silence for a while, the Guru got up. 'I must leave you now,' he said. 'If you go to stay with Damayanti you will be a long way off, but do go to her, if you find you can.'

Having ridden part of the way towards the town, Jali stopped and sent his groom on ahead. Then he turned towards the knoll to which he had once seen the Guru directing his steps. After tying his horse to a tree he knelt down and tried to pray. But it was in vain. Underneath his hopes and longings there remained a hard core of scepticism and unresolved doubt; and whether this scepticism was honest or arose out of mere weakness of character he did not know.

JALI rode back to the Palace in a condition of dark, bleak discouragement. He was going to tell Lakshmi that he wanted to stay with Mohan and Damayanti instead of with Maya, and the prospect of doing this was exceedingly disagreeable. But why? Why was he making so much of an affair that really had no importance? This was a question that he could not yet bring himself to examine. His decision had imposed itself upon him against his will, and he fell into a deepening ill-humour, which was directed against himself, against Lakshmi, against everybody.

This mood persisted, and during the next few days he continually stopped himself from thinking about what lay before him. None the less, however, a part of his mind was occupied with the unwelcome subject all the time; and the moment came when he had to give in. He threw away the book that he was trying to read, sprang to his feet, and fell to pacing up and down.

He was no longer enjoying his life in the Palace, and least of all the hours he spent with Lakshmi. This claimed attention first of all, because there was something discreditable in thus pretending to oneself that one was feeling friendly and happy when one was not. Nor could he be sure that he really was taking Lakshmi in. He was not clever at dissimulation. Indeed, it was fortunate, he reflected, that his Palace days were drawing to an end, for if his disaffection had not already been detected, it soon would be.

Disaffection? Yes! for hidden away in his heart was the knowledge that he could no longer accept these people — Bhoj, Lakshmi, and the rest. Some change had taken place in him, so that he could no longer feel himself to be one of them — either in thought, or feeling, or intent. And you had to accept them without any reserves in order to be accepted yourself. This was a matter upon which they were absolutely uncompromising. Either you accepted them, their values, their valuation of themselves, or you did not. And he did not.

At any moment this, the true state of affairs, might be exposed. At any moment Lakshmi might turn an ironical glance upon him, which would say: 'Ah! so you're no longer with us!' None of them was quicker than she to scent out the heretic. But what a poor little

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heretic he made! It was all very well for the Guru to stand serene on his own ground; he had convictions, he had character; and a record that bore witness to both. He justified himself even in Lakshmi's eyes. 'But I,' thought Jali, 'am a heretic not by strength of will but against my will, helplessly. I try to adopt their opinions, I try to reflect their feelings, and I fail.'

Still walking up and down, he groped among his ideas with a perplexity that was coloured by irritation and even dismay. 'Why do I now feel so different?' was his question. He recalled how he had paced this same stretch of floor with a glowing sense of solidarity with these people, and of self-importance in consequence. He had imagined himself becoming a wise and beneficent despot in the manner of Bhoj. With a Ranee, whose elegance rivalled Lakshmi's, he had entertained glittering companies, and lived the life of one who is more than a man. What a fool! It was as much his own self-conceit as their pretensions that had brought him to this idiocy. Why, why hadn't he seen long ago that in all of them there was something wrong? He couldn't yet put his finger on it, but it was there. They lived fair-seeming lives; there was nothing slack, nothing gross, nothing tasteless in Bhoj or Lakshmi; they had courage, self-control, energy, and pride; but there was something fundamentally wrong.

What was it? Thinking of his father's court, it struck him first of all that at Vidyapur one drew one's breath with an immeasurably greater freedom. At Vidyapur there was freedom for spontaneous movements of the mind and heart. Here — in spite of all these splendid appearances of self-assurance and ease — everyone laboured under an unceasing self-consciousness, self-constraint, and strain. These people were the slaves of their own social standards, and their slavishness was so ingrained that not one of them recognized it for what it was.

A woman like Lakshmi was concerned to keep up appearances every instant of the day — and not only for the benefit of others but to satisfy her own private self-esteem. With every movement, every intonation, and — so far as possible — with every thought and emotion she was applying tiny brush-strokes to a never-finished portrait of herself. At this moment, most probably, she was lying with her women friends grouped about her, in seeming negligence and ease upon her couch. Every muscle apparently relaxed, she would be speaking lazily, and even, possibly yawning. But, actually,

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at no time was she further from real spontaneity than in moments such as these. For she was presenting a picture not of what she was but of what she longed to be. The deep, unacknowledged craving of her heart was that the strain, the calculation, might not be there. And her unconfessed shame was this: the constant presence of effort, the constant absence of ordinary ease of mind.

How dreadful it was to live like that! and how silly! To what end was it done? To reply: 'For the sake of appearances' was not to get to the root of the matter. For the question remained: Why did all these people attach such an exaggerated value to appearances? Why were their lives dedicated to this empty cult — men and women alike — with never a thought in their heads that was not overshadowed by the preoccupation to carry things off with an air?

Did it bespeak some secret weakness of personality? Hardly. For Bhoj and Lakshmi both had personalities that could not easily be ignored. And yet it was certainly very hard to imagine what Lakshmi's naked personality — her central self, stripped of all pretences — would be like. It was improbable, too, that she herself knew — or wanted to know. Her whole effort during all her life had been to dress up the poor, neglected substance of her spirit in fine clothes. What she knew of herself probably bored her; she was probably profoundly cynical about it. And as for the external world, she had looked at it so long through the eyes of others that she had lost the use of her own.

But where was all this leading him? Nowhere! With a jerk he took himself back to an earlier point in his musings. *Why* was he now feeling so unfriendly towards all these people? *Why* had his sentiments changed? A partial answer to the question presented itself at once. He didn't like the person he became when in their company. Their company made him disloyal to nearly everything that he really and truly held in respect. But, again, *why* was this? The Guru remained loyal to himself in every company.

At this point Jali began to suffer great discomfort. He perceived that the violence of his revolt and the virulence of his dislike were symptoms of weakness. He disliked these people because he resembled them, or because he wanted to resemble them and failed, or because he feared to become like them — a thing he could not do without greater shame than they, because he would be acting with greater awareness. In any case he was weak, for, although they did not deceive him, they imposed themselves. His personality was not

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strong enough to stand up against the imposing force of the appearances they put up. 'Well!' he said to himself, 'I can, at any rate, get them to drop me.' And with that he went down into the court to find Lakshmi.

There she was, stretched out upon her divan, as he had seen her so many times before. And she was beautiful, and what she said was always intelligent and often witty. Why, then, was he conscious only of an everlasting sameness? The answer was that this was not life, it was the acting of a play. That the words were always fresh made no difference, for it was the same play acted over and over again.

In this thought he lost himself, staring at her, and seeing beneath her lovely, modulated animation a devastating boredom. Her greatest courage was, perhaps, the secret courage that went to hiding this.

In their early days, to be sure, he had delighted in filling the rôle assigned to him in her play. He had been alert to take his cue from her, answering suitably to her nonchalance — a nonchalance in which every look, every gesture, was a work of conscious art; a nonchalance in which every sentence, every thought even, was given a lightning scrutiny before it was allowed to pass. But what a strain it was! And what was it all done *for*?

He was able to follow his own thoughts undisturbed because she was making no demands upon him. She had seen that he was pre-occupied, and was letting her conversation flow on. Oh, that social self-consciousness of hers that never for an instant slept! But, if *he* was tired of it, good heavens, wasn't she?

Then suddenly he became aware of a change in her: her eyes and lips gave a hint of secret, ironic amusement. 'If she hasn't already guessed what is coming, she soon will,' he thought. 'And she will meet me half-way. She will make everything as easy as possible.'

He focussed his attention to hear her saying: 'It's a pity we shan't have another opportunity of wandering round the town together. But there are only a few days left now, and I'm going to be busy all the time. I'm so glad to think you'll be with darling Maya. Her house, like her, is quite delicious.'

The young man drew a long breath. He felt the colour rising to his cheeks, as he said: 'There is something I have been wanting to ask you for some time. It's this. I've had a letter from Princess Damayanti, and she . . .'

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A voice interrupted him. It was the Rajah, who had unexpectedly appeared from round the corner. Bhoj's voice was raised a little; his expression, too, was animated, his step brisk. 'Mohan has just turned up!' he cried, 'Mohan with his Gujars and yaks is at the door! Shall I have them all shown in?'

There was some joke here to which Jali had no key; but the next moment the Rajah began to explain. To give attention was not easy, for an imp of amusement had already signalled to him from Lakshmi's blue eyes that his unfinished sentence need never be finished. His colour deepened, but he continued to look up into the Rajah's aristocratic, shrewd, and yet stupid face with his best air of interest.

Three years ago, on an expedition into the high mountains, Mohan had lost his way and would have died of cold and hunger but for the kindness of a party of Gujars, who took him back to their village and there kept him until he recovered his strength. This took a month, for he was suffering from frostbite, and, before leaving, he made his new friends promise that if ever they were in trouble they would come to him and let him prove his gratitude. Well, a few months ago a landslide had occurred, blocking their mountain-valley, which was being rapidly converted into a lake. Whereupon the Gujars had remembered their promise, and here they were.

The Rajah was just finishing when a step sounded in the cloister and Mohan appeared.

'My dear!' exclaimed Lakshmi, holding out both hands, 'we are simply longing to see you! Where have you left your caravan?'

Mohan explained that the caravan, consisting of about fifty wild-looking hillsmen accompanied by their women and children, their goats and mountain-sheep, had camped just outside the town. Always quick to laugh at himself, he made no attempt to disguise the fact that this confiding folk had placed him in a somewhat comic position. He was pleased, but also a little anxious, for not if he could possibly help it must the Gujars have cause to regret having put their trust in him. He was going to take them up to the plateau the next day.

While he was talking Jali reflected once again that of all the men he had met in Daulatpur this was the one to whom he felt the most attracted. But Mohan's visits to the Palace had been infrequent and short, and never yet had the young man had the opportunity to talk

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to him alone. In all outward respects, and probably, Jali thought, in many inward ones, Mohan was markedly unlike his brother. Bhoj was dark and aquiline, and deliberate in movement and speech. He carried his lanky body with a stoop, and his eyes, although fine, were wary. Mohan was a man of much fairer complexion, his eyes were wide and candid, and he moved with a careless boyish quickness.

It had struck Jali as singularly fortunate that Mohan had arrived just when he did, and, determined to draw the Prince's attention on to himself, he joined in the conversation as much as he could. Presently the Rajah, who, when he had found a joke would not readily let it go, was once more on the subject of yaks. 'My dear Mohan, your Gujars, you say, are none the worse for their journey; but what about the yaks? I greatly doubt whether you can tell a sick yak from a sound one.'

'I'm sure *I* can,' put in Jali, and, turning to Mohan, he went on: 'May I go and take a look at that caravan?'

'Yes. And why not come along with me to-morrow? We are going to start at daybreak. The caravan moves very slowly, and I want to arrive before dark.'

'Come along with you?' murmured Jali doubtfully.

'Yes. Didn't you get a letter from Damayanti asking you to stay with us at Hawa Ghar? We count on your coming.'

Jali shot a glance at Lakshmi, and Mohan continued: 'You shall be my chief herdsman. Lakshmi, is there any reason why Jali shouldn't come with me?'

For an instant Lakshmi's laughing eyes met Jali's, then she said: 'Poor Maya had been hoping that Jali would stay with her; but I can easily explain . . .'

'Yes. Please do!' And then, observing the eagerness in Jali's eyes, he went on: 'I'm sorry for Maya, but the arrival of my Gujars has settled the matter, hasn't it? I need a herdsman and Jali has admitted that he is an authority on yaks. You can tell her that.'

Lakshmi gave Jali a really charming smile. 'Shall I?'

The young man coloured, and it was in an accent of genuine gratitude that he replied: 'I wish you would!'



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## PART FOUR

**THE** sun had only just risen when Jali rode through the dark, northern gateway of Daulatpur. Emerging into the breezy sunlight of the open fields, he drew up and looked about him. The view in this direction was new, and his heart gave a leap when he descried in the far distance, rising almost sheer out of the plain, a dim, blue tableland.

A few hundred yards from the gate, in a space set apart for caravans, there was a great noise and stir. This came from a large company of peasant-folk, outlandish in appearance, who had goats and sheep of unfamiliar breed in their midst. Riding up, he soon found Mohan, who was watching the scene with a smile of mingled amusement and perplexity. 'Look at them!' he exclaimed. 'There's not one who shows bad temper! But, all the same, if they don't soon get away from this heat, they'll die.'

The poor Gujars certainly did look very hot and dusty, but it was equally evident that they were still full of energy and in the best of spirits. Jali could see that their faith in Mohan was complete; one and all they were sure that their troubles were over, and that at the end of the day's march they would be watering their flocks in an earthly paradise. Delightful, too, was Mohan's appreciation of the simplicity, good humour, and courage of his friends. There was only one cloud on his horizon: Would he be able to make this migration a success?

Riding along at Mohan's side, Jali felt extraordinarily light-hearted. The distant tableland, floating insubstantially on the haze of the plain, seemed to promise a new life full of freedom and energy; the air that blew from that direction was a lighter, nimbler air. Talking and laughing with Mohan, and exchanging — chiefly by pantomime — jokes with the Gujars, he gave little thought to the future and even less to the past. Already his last hours at the Palace seemed remote. The evening, it was true, had not been very agreeable, but then he had never thought it would be. At dinner a few familiar guests were present, and the moment arrived — as it had to — when his choice was made public. For a minute he became the centre of attention, while jokes were made about Mohan, the Gujars, and the

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legendary yaks. But Lakshmi showed not the smallest sign of unfriendliness, so that at the end of the evening, when saying good-bye, his expressions of gratitude were much more sincere than he had feared they might be.

The ride went on until mid-day, when the party arrived at the park of the Old Summer Palace which was Mohan's official residence. After establishing his caravan in the shade beside a pond, he led the way on under the trees for another mile or so until a big stone house, built like a hunting-lodge, came into view. 'Here we are,' he said, 'but Damayanti and I don't actually live in this place now. We prefer the plateau where the air is cooler, and there is more to do.'

Running up some broad steps, he pushed open a sun-scorched door and entered the hall. His arrival was evidently not expected, and while a meal was being prepared he took his guest for a bathe in the swimming-pool at the back of the house. Lying in the cool, clear, deep water, Jali was possessed by a profound sense of well-being, and at the meal which followed he drank palm-wine to which he was not accustomed, so that soon he began to feel sleepy. 'Come upstairs,' said Mohan. 'There's plenty of time for a siesta. The rest of our journey won't take us more than three hours.'

In a large, shady room Jali lay himself down and quickly lost consciousness, but he woke before long to the sound of his blind flapping in the breeze. There was a humming of bees and a cooing of doves in the garden outside. After lying still for a while he got up and went downstairs again. The soft leather of his shoes made no sound on the marble floor, and to his satisfaction there was no one about, so that he was able to wander from room to room as he pleased. An agreeable shabbiness met his eye everywhere. The taste that had originally gone to the furnishing of the house had been good, and then, apparently as time passed, the familiar things had become so familiar that no one had thought of changing them. Stepping out on to a veranda he came upon a gardener who was having a nap in the shade with his tame mongoose beside him. Taken unawares, the old man got up with an expression of pained dignity, bowed low, and moved slowly away. The mongoose, which trotted after him with wide yawns, was the oldest Jali had ever seen; it had very little hair and its whiskers were grey.

As he was leaning over the balustrade and looking out over the sunlit garden, the servant who had waited at table stepped out from the house. A soldierly man of some sixty years, he had talked to

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Mohan during the meal much as one talks to a well-meaning but irresponsible child. He now cautioned Jali that the Master was still asleep and that care must be taken not to wake him as his room was just above. With these words he kindly but firmly led the way to another veranda, and then, folding his arms, leaned back against a pillar in the attitude of one who is prepared for a leisurely chat. He had been in the service of the Prince some fifteen years, he said — yes, at least fifteen! — but what was time, as commonly reckoned, when two spirits discovered affinity? This palace, he went on, was one of the five summer palaces that belonged to the Royal Family; it was the smallest and oldest, and had been chosen by the Prince as his residence when he renounced the Throne. With his Princess he had lived here for about a year. That was before they decided to move nearer to their friends on the flat mountain of Laku.

There was one sentence in this speech that had caused Jali to give an inward start of surprise. Had Mohan renounced the Throne? Here was a story that promised to cast light upon much that had been puzzling him.

‘When did the Prince abdicate?’ he asked. ‘And why?’

Mukund — for that was the man’s name — looked up at the ceiling and then said: ‘The Prince gave up the Throne to his younger brother, our present Rajah, nine years ago. He was then twenty-five, and . . .’

‘But surely Rajah Bhoj is the elder of the two?’

‘He looks older, but actually he is two years younger. Prince Mohan resigned in his favour because that was the Emperor’s wish. But it was also the Prince’s own wish, for he likes to be on terms of true equality and friendship with other men.’

This was intensely interesting! Jali stared into Mukund’s grave and placid countenance with a curiosity that longed to express itself in a torrent of questions, but all he allowed himself to say was, ‘Those friends of the Prince’s who live on the tableland — who are they? And what does he do there?’

‘He built himself a house on Laku soon after his abdication — a simple house, not a palace. His friends are all who believe in friendship.’

‘But — who are they?’

Mukund smiled. ‘The people of the district — like any others. The man who tills the ground, and keeps his flocks, and marries a wife and rears children. The young Maharajah will see for himself.’

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Again he smiled. 'Some are more attractive than others, but one and all have the merit of right thinking, and that is what the Prince and Princess care about.'

'On what subject do they think rightly?' inquired Jali, after a long reflective pause.

'On the subject of money.'

'Money!'

'Yes, money — than which nothing is more important.'

'What about religion?'

The man smiled. 'I see that the young Maharajah is as yet uninstructed, but it is not for me to instruct him. At Hawa Ghar he will see for himself that friendship and religion are one, and that the enemy of friendship is money — and the pride that money brings.'

At this point, to Jali's great regret, the conversation was cut short by the appearance of Mohan in the doorway. Jali, blushing slightly, gazed at him with a curiosity and interest that he could not dissemble; but Mohan, who was yawning and stretching himself, noticed nothing. 'I have been thinking that it's quite unnecessary for us to march step by step with our Gujars for the rest of the way. The caravan moves so slowly that it won't arrive till midnight. We'll ride on ahead and prepare for them.'

So a few minutes later they were on their way again, nor was it long before they reached the cliff, a great face of pink and yellow rock, broken by a single broad fissure up which there ran a steeply-sloping road. An hour's riding brought them out on to the rim of the tableland, and now Jali had before his eyes a huge, level expanse of waving grass that shimmered under the wind and sun. Up here a cool wind blew, and the air, which smelt different from that of the plains, whistled through the tall, dry grass-stems with a lonely sound.

While he was still looking about him, Mohan broke the silence to say: 'I am not quite happy about having left my Gujars. Would you mind if I turned back, leaving you to travel these last few miles alone?'

Jali shook his head, and, after receiving his directions, rode on. It was late afternoon, the sun lengthened his shadow out before him on the tawny grass, while in the clear sky above flocks of quail were flying home to roost in the clumps of ilex that rose up here and there. Presently, drawing from his pocket a flute which one of the Gujars had given him, he tried to play the air that they had been singing

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on their march. There was no mistaking the direction because Mohan had given him a land-mark — the ruins of an ancient Buddhist monastery that shone out tall and golden five or six miles away. Mohan had said that his house was among the trees by which the ruin was surrounded, so on reaching them Jali dismounted and looked about him. Failing to see any human habitation, he tied his horse to a branch and set off on foot down a narrow, shady path. Soon he came to an ancient brick wall, about seven foot high, and walked along till it made a turn at right angles. Wild convolvuluses hung over the stone coping, and some bamboos grew in the corner, but the enclosed space on the other side of the wall was otherwise without trees. Perhaps, he thought, it was a garden, so he followed the wall, hoping to find a gate. The sun was now sinking to the horizon; alone the tops of the trees and the tall, ruinous front of the monastery caught the light. Reflecting that darkness would soon fall, he paused, and then noticed that holes where the brick had decayed would make it no difficult matter to climb the wall. This he did, and sat down on the coping to look about him.

Beneath was an oblong pool about fifty feet in length with a stone-flagged path running round it. A large figure of Vishnu, outstretched as if in sleep, lay in the water, the head with its aureole of hooded cobras just rising above the surface. Calm and beautiful was the face of stone that looked up into the evening sky. The place breathed out repose. Neither the ripples running over the water, nor the waving of the ferns, nor the swaying of the convolvuluses on the wall disturbed the scene's tranquillity.

At the four corners of Vishnu's couch small, square pillars of stone rose from the water to the height of a man and were crowned with ordinary flower-pots that had evidently not been touched for a long time. They contained nothing but some plants of basil and the same wild convolvuluses, whose flowers were blue, purple, and white. The place, however, did not give an impression of abandonment; there were no ugly weeds anywhere, nor any dead leaves on the pathway of mossy stone.

All this Jali observed before noticing that on a seat in the corner a young woman was sitting. Her head was bent over a book, so that all that he saw of her was her hair ruffled by the wind, a slender shoulder covered by a sari of pale green muslin, a bare ankle and a sandalled foot. 'Can it be Damayanti?' he asked himself, and the next moment, when she looked up — to stare with an abstracted

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frown over the water — he was no longer in any doubt. It was Damayanti, and he now observed that she was not reading but writing; a half-written page was on her lap, and other sheets lay by her side.

Sitting quite still, he continued to look down, now at the slight, human figure, and now at the god of stone. In the Court of the Silver Lotus he had been a little intimidated by Damayanti; here he saw her in a different light. The presence of that sleeping god reduced her to a simple human creature, very fragile and very unenduring. And suddenly he felt his spirit rise up in pity for man, against the majestic self-sufficiency of the gods.

He was still lost in contemplation when she made a snatch at a sheet of manuscript which a puff of wind was carrying away, and in so doing caught sight of him. 'Oh,' she exclaimed with a smile. 'It's you!'

Jali jumped down from the wall and came forward. 'Yes, I hope . . .'

'No, no. I'm so glad you've found me. But I can't imagine how you knew I was here, or how . . .' she broke off with a sharp cry, for another and a stronger puff of wind had picked up a dozen of her loose sheets and was dropping them on to the surface of the water.

The two looked at one another and laughed, then, running down some shallow steps, Jali waded into the pool and began to collect the sheets. But she sprang up, and catching hold of his sleeve, insisted on his coming out again. 'Look! It's no use. The ink runs. Besides, there are water-snakes in the pool and you'll frighten them. And then' — here she laughed again — 'as I might have begun by saying, you will get wet. In fact, you have already got wet.'

As he stepped up out of the water she considered him thoughtfully. 'Don't you think you ought to go up to the house to change?'

Jali assured her that there was no hurry, and they went back to the stone seat where she had been sitting. Her face, which he was now able to see clearly for the first time, was more youthful than he had imagined it. He had heard that she was nearly thirty; at this moment she looked more like a girl of fifteen; her quick movements and her slenderness contributed to this impression — and something else, he couldn't say what.

'How did you know I was here?' she asked again. 'I suppose Savitri told you.'

'No. I haven't seen Savitri — or anyone. When I climbed that wall I had no idea I should find you here — or Vishnu.'

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'Vishnu has been lying in that pool for hundreds of years. He was there long before Buddha was born. He had a temple once in among those trees.'

Jali reflected. 'Didn't Vishnu lie asleep for four months, floating on a sea of milk?'

'Yes. This pool is his sea. But I know nothing more about the legend. And I believe there are no other pools like this. The Guru says . . . Did he speak to you of this pool?'

Jali shook his head. 'I came here quite by chance.' And he told her how he had arrived alone and was looking for the house.

On this she turned to gather up her books and papers, but he said: 'Can't we stay a little longer? This place is so beautiful. Do you come here often?'

She nodded.

'You come to write?' he asked timidly.

'Sometimes.'

He hesitated, then took courage. 'What are you writing?'

She gave a little laugh. 'The story of my life — and a kind of journal as well. The past and present are mixed up — as in life.'

Moved by a sudden impulse, Jali told her of the long hours he had spent trying to write poetry: how, when the mood was upon him, he felt convinced that a thing of disembodied beauty was struggling towards self-embodiment. Why was it so difficult to give passage to the beauty that was there? Why did he always deform it into a commonplace, a conventionality?

She smiled, and he noticed that she was tearing up the few pages that the wind had not scattered.

'Why do you do that?' he asked.

'Because I don't succeed either. What I have written is not particularly true.'

'Particularly!' he echoed, smiling.

'Well, you know what I mean.'

The wind had dropped, dusk was falling, but the topmost towers of the monastery still shone golden above the trees. Glancing sideways he noticed that her eyes were resting sadly on the dove-coloured water, which made a second sky at their feet. And in this sky the face of the god floated like a supernatural sign.

Fear lest she should get up, a longing to keep her here, to extend these moments for ever, filled his heart with a veritable passion. Drawing the flute from his pocket he played the little air that he had

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at last got right — a wandering, disconsolate sequence of notes which to his imagination were the voice of a grey wind sweeping over icy plains.

‘Play that again!’ she said, and he rejoiced to feel her eyes, large and dark in the half-light, fixed intently upon him. He was weaving a spell about her, he was contributing magic of his own to these moments of divine enchantment. With an intensity unknown to him ever before he was aware of the world around him — branch-entangled gleamings left behind by the sun, a cool upwelling from the low-hung moon, small bird-sounds, leafy silences, scents — now cold, now warm — breathed up from the water and the stone. All this he felt, all this he *was*.

*Tat tvam asi.*

For a while, after he had finished, they sat there without speaking. Then with a sigh she got up and led the way through a narrow gate, and down a small, winding path. In a few minutes they came out from under the trees and he found himself upon a lawn with a house opposite. The moon was just appearing over its low roof.



A LITTLE later, standing by the window of his room, he was looking out over the lawn — still in a dream, but struggling to bring his mind down to earth. The moonlight was soft; in the sky above stars were shining; and on the grass below he noticed glow-worms, whose small green lights seemed to reflect the faint constellations overhead. A wave of happiness swept over him. 'This is Paradise!' he whispered to himself. 'Paradise!'

After making ready for supper he went downstairs; he was impatient to be with Damayanti again, and looked for her in the veranda, where a table had been laid for their meal. But she was not yet there, so he fell to pacing to and fro on the grass outside. The yellow shine of a lamp showed where her room was, and, as he gazed upwards, he suddenly heard her talking and laughing with Savitri.

In an instant his spirit drooped. The hour that had just gone by — what had it meant to her? Certainly very little. His exaltation and ecstāsy were a foolishness that mocked him. Damayanti had a life in which he could take at best only a very insignificant place. 'I love her,' he thought, 'but my love is merely silly.'

A little later, returning to the veranda, he found Damayanti there waiting for him. 'I didn't call you,' she said laughingly, 'because you looked as if you were thinking very hard. Were you composing a poem?'

Jali shook his head; and for a while he found it difficult to talk, or even to listen to what she was saying. But gradually his spirits revived, and the evening went by very fast.

When midnight was not far off she suggested that they should walk out a little way to meet Mohan and the caravan. The moon, now high, was flooding the broad upland with light; they moved across a great silvery sea, empty but for the few scattered ilxes that loomed dark like enormous monsters sunk in sleep. Damayanti's fine, fair hair shone like a kind of halo. Her forehead was pale, with the eye-sockets deep in shadow; lighter shadows hollowed her pale cheeks and her neck. Walking fast in her preoccupation, she leant forward with head thrown back as if against a wind; and, although there was no wind, her thin dress floated behind her.

Presently something white appeared not far ahead, and after a

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moment Jali recognized a large boulder that he had passed on his way in the afternoon. He had noticed it because it stood alone and was shaped like a toad. Perhaps Damayanti had fixed upon this boulder as her mark; perhaps she would stop when they got there. He hoped she would. He told himself that, as they sat there waiting, between them — without a word spoken — something would pass, so that she would know what he felt.

When they got to the boulder she walked quickly round it to a place where there was an easy climb to the top. He followed her, and together they stood staring in the direction from which Mohan's caravan might be expected to appear. But there was no sign, no sound. The silvery grass stretched endlessly away; and above it, very high and very tenuous, a fleece of silvery clouds veiled the dark sky behind. In this hushed world it seemed unreasonable to expect any movement of life, or even any change. No dawn would come; this night with motionless moon would last to the world's end.

Glancing into Damayanti's face, he saw anxiety there; but presently, turning to him, she said: 'Mohan and I often walk to this stone. We like it.'

Hardly had she finished speaking when his ears caught the sound of a horse's hoofs. Somewhere, hidden by the night, a rider was galloping hard.

'Listen!' he whispered.

She nodded, her face intent.

For a minute or more they stood motionless, while the thudding hoof-beats grew louder; then, almost as soon as he was seen, a horseman was upon them, and had drawn rein at the foot of the rock.

At once she called out: 'Yes, Rabindra, it's me! What news of the Prince?'

'He has come to no harm. But my news is bad.'

'Wait! I'm coming down.' Quickly she made her descent, and Jali followed her. He already knew Rabindra and admired him for the way in which he had helped Mohan with the Gujars. As he now listened to him his admiration and liking increased. The caravan had suffered a sudden and treacherous attack. At nightfall, just after it had entered the defile, a shot had rung out, and this signal had been followed by a burst of gunfire from assailants posted on both sides. Completely unprepared — for no one had any reason to think that the Gujars had enemies — the caravan was unable to

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make an immediate reply to the assault; but as soon as a return volley had been fired, nothing more was heard of the enemy; they fled. Grievous harm, however, had already been done, for the marchers in the narrow defile had presented an easy target.

His story told, Rabindra looked down and away.

'How many have been killed?' asked Damayanti in a low voice.

'Nearly half are either wounded or dead.'

She gave a cry of horror. 'Nearly half!'

'Yes. Men, women and children alike; for the shooting was all done at random.'

'But who were the attackers? And why were they so cruel?'

Rabindra gave a bitter laugh. 'I caught one of them — a simple man, a stupid man. He had been terrified by false reports. He had been told that the strangers were intentionally spreading cholera wherever they went.'

For a minute or more she was silent; then she lifted her head and said: 'And what now? What is Mohan going to do?'

'He is taking the Gujars back to the Summer Palace. Those that are wounded he will lodge in the house. Then he will go to Daulatpur to see the Rajah. He expects to be back here to-morrow.'

'I shall go down to the Summer Palace at once. At least I can help to look after the wounded.'

Rabindra shook his head. 'The Prince foresaw that you would say that, and he begs you on no account to come down to the plain. He wants you to stay here with Savitri. Down there you would only be adding to his anxiety.'

Damayanti said nothing, and after a pause Rabindra, who had dismounted, turned to tighten his saddle-girths. 'I must go back', he muttered.

For a few moments no one moved; the silence, broken only by the heavy breathing of the horse, was profound and, to Jali's imagination, full of menace. 'Believe me,' said Rabindra at last. 'The Prince is right in asking you to wait here, he will be with you to-morrow evening.' And with a salute he swung himself into the saddle and rode off.

Few words passed between Jali and Damayanti on the way home. To Jali it seemed that the whole sweep of earth and sky had become hostile; in this senseless onslaught upon a little band of inoffensive strangers he saw the action of underground forces that he could not understand. Who had spread abroad these reports about the Gujars?

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And why? When he put these questions to Damayanti she shook her head and made no answer.

On reaching the house they parted at once for the night, but before going upstairs she paused, fixed upon him eyes that were dark with unexpressed emotion, and said: 'Mohan looked upon these people as children committed to his charge. What effect this will have upon him I don't know. I only hope . . .' Breaking off, she turned and walked quickly away.

Jali woke early next morning and lay in bed musing over the last twenty-four hours. How completely the inner landscape of his life had changed! The Palace of Daulatpur had receded further still into the past, and he wanted nothing better than to forget it.

There was a good deal of stir in the house, and on going down he learnt from the boy who brought him his breakfast that it was caused by the unexpected arrival of about twenty peasants from the neighbouring villages, who had come for advice in a sudden emergency. The Emperor's tax-collectors had made their much-dreaded appearance on the plateau, and taxes were to be collected for the first time upon a new system.

'And who is attending to this? The Princess?'

'Yes. She is in the big meeting-room now.'

'Would she mind if I went in and watched?'

The boy gave a smile. 'No. Anyone can go in.'

He took Jali along a passage and threw open the door of a large barn-like room from which there came a confusing clamour. The peasants were standing about in an excited crowd on the bare floor and haranguing each other. Damayanti, seated on a cushion in the corner, with two greybeards beside her, was making no attempt to establish order. Occasionally she addressed a word to one or the other, but her companions seemed to be either too deaf or too stupid to understand what she said. She was pale and looked tired.

After standing irresolutely on the threshold for a minute, Jali went back to the veranda, there to sit staring out over the sun-lit lawn. Misgivings had suddenly returned to him. He remembered all too clearly now the light irony with which Bhoj and Lakshmi had made allusion to certain eccentricities in Mohan and his wife, and at last he understood what they had in mind. These two had taken the Guru as their guide; what this meant he could now see; and his new understanding caused his spirit to sink, and his heart to ache for

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them. Had they even a remote chance of success? No! Too much was against them.

Then his reflections took a more personal turn. He looked at his love for Damayanti, and saw it as flimsy, futile, immature. How could she fail to regard it in the same light? — as a thing without weight in a world where reality was heavy and hard. Toil, conflict and suffering — these made up the basic substance of men's lives. And she, who knew it, was not likely to have much patience with him or his calf-love.

He was still lost in these miserable reflections when Damayanti appeared in the doorway, and, although her face was sad, she was without the harassed expression that he had been expecting.

'I saw you look in,' she said smilingly. 'A single glance was evidently enough!'

He had nothing to reply to this, so he asked: 'Have you any more news of the Gujars?'

'Yes. They are now camping in and round the Summer Palace. The wounded can be well looked after there. — But two more have died.'

While speaking she had seated herself in the corner, and now there came a silence, during which Jali sought for words, but vainly, the confusion of his thoughts and feelings being increased by shyness.

'Is there nothing I can do?' he stammered at last. 'No way in which I can help?'

She gave him another smile, but a sad one, and before her answer had time to come, his pent-up feelings burst forth. 'I wish . . . Oh, how I do wish that you would explain . . .!'

'Explain?'

'Yes. I want to understand the situation — everything! I want to help.'

Her eyes replied to this, and so kindly that Jali's heart leapt up. But she hesitated and finally said: 'You seem to have arrived here at an unlucky moment. I'm afraid . . .'

He gave a gasp. 'You are not going to tell me that I can't stay?'

'No. I wasn't going to say that, although —' she looked away — 'it might be better for you if you did go.'

'Well! I refuse.' And he laughed in his relief.

She continued to look away. 'I'm afraid we have a difficult time before us. Matters are coming to a head.'

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'Tell me!' he urged. 'Why mayn't I know?'

Turning, she gave him a long and steady scrutiny. 'Of course you may know. But where am I to begin?'

'Anywhere! When you speak of things coming to a head, what do you mean? The arrival of the tax-collectors?'

'Partly — You see, it is like this: last year Akbar devised a new system of taxation, and his new taxes, while apparently lighter, are actually more extortionate. Bhoj is an exceptionally good Rajah, as Rajahs go. In order to meet the situation he has reduced his own taxes; but . . . ' She stopped short and sighed.

'If Bhoj has done that, why isn't everybody satisfied?'

'Akbar is not satisfied because, rich as he is, he envies the Rajahs their wealth, and would prefer to take money from them instead of from the peasants. But that he doesn't dare to attempt. Bhoj is not satisfied because he doesn't like acting under pressure of this kind, and many other Rajahs, who are less rich or less open-handed, regard him as a black-leg. The peasants are not satisfied because they know that Bhoj is so immensely rich that this small drain on his income is nothing to him. They argue that his generosity is no generosity because it suits him to keep them from actually starving to death.' She paused and smiled. 'In a sense of course they are right.'

'And what about you and Mohan in all this?'

'Well, when Mohan abdicated, Akbar had private reasons for feeling unfriendly towards him, and he stipulated that Mohan should be left without any money of his own. He can't of course prevent Bhoj from making his brother a yearly allowance, and this Bhoj does — and would do still more willingly, if Mohan's ideas on the subject of money were more like his own. Unfortunately he thinks Mohan's ideas not only odd but dangerous, even wicked.' She smiled again. 'At the Palace this must have been made clear to you '

'I didn't gather that his ideas were considered *wicked*.'

'They prefer not to give them that importance.'

'Nor was I told that *money* was the issue.'

'That is because to give money its importance is bad taste. The richer the company the more strictly the subject of money is taboo.'

Jali smiled reflectively. 'That's true.'

'Well! What Mohan does with the money given to him by Bhoj is this: he calls together a meeting of all the peasants in this neighbourhood to decide how that money shall be spent. They decide that he

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and I shall have so much — and they are very generous in their allowance, for, as you see, we live quite comfortably — and the rest they divide among themselves according to their needs. If differences arise the head-men of the village settle them. Unfortunately, all this is considered by Bhoj to be extremely demoralizing. And in a sense it is; for all the villages outside Mohan's little ring envy those inside it.'

Jali took thought for a moment, then said: 'But the peasants here look even more lean and wretched than those in the low-lands round Daulatpur. How is that?'

'Mohan has a poor district for his experiment. The soil of Laku is thin and stony, yet even up here the people are no worse off than in most parts of India. And it's encouraging to see that the rich peasants below envy the poorer ones here as soon as they begin to understand that here we live under a different idea.'

'Then monëy is not everything; money is not at the root of the matter.'

'Money is certainly not everything, but money *is* at the root of the matter. Hasn't the Guru talked to you about that?'

Jali shook his head, but at this moment Savitri came bounding into the veranda and no further talk was possible.

In the afternoon he went for a ride by himself, and on returning learnt that Mohan had arrived about an hour ago. From the entrance hall he heard him talking to Damayanti in the veranda, and while he stood there uncertain whether to join them, Mohan called out to him. In the half-light it was difficult to see faces clearly, but he was shocked by the change that had come over Mohan, who was now looking careworn — almost haggard.

'Sit down!' And Mohan continued his restless pacing to and fro 'I was talking about my visit to the Palace this morning. It was very unsatisfactory. I couldn't get Bhoj to give me any time. He and Lakshmi were just starting off on their visit to the Sesodia.'

For a moment he halted before Damayanti, looking down at her sombrely; then, 'I came away almost at once,' he went on, 'because I wasn't going to waste time arguing with Moti Singh, which was what Bhoj wanted me to do.'

Jali inquired timidly who Moti Singh was.

The question provoked a stare of surprise. 'You must have come across him in the Palace, surely?'

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'I don't think so.'

'Well!' And Mohan glanced from Jali to Damayanti and back again. 'Moti Singh is the State Chancellor and Bhoj's factotum. In fact he runs the whole State. Did he never even appear at a meal when you were there? He lives in the Palace, you know.'

Jali reflected. 'There were so many people hovering in the background. I can't distinguish Moti Singh unless he was the big, fat man — quite bald — who used to . . .'

'No, no. That was the Master of the Tiger Hunt. Moti Singh is much younger, not much over thirty. Sleek and neat, with big spectacles and steady eyes; a wary-looking young man, very deferential in manner to Bhoj and Lakshmi.'

'I think I know who you mean. But surely that can't be the Chancellor? He didn't seem nearly as important as the big, bald man.'

'All the same that was Moti Singh,' returned Mohan; and then again he fixed upon Damayanti a troubled look. 'Ought I to have tackled the creature? Ought I? I shouldn't have done any good.'

Damayanti sighed. 'I suppose you will have to see him at one time or another; but I think you did well to come here first. In the heat of the moment you might easily have said something that would give him a handle against you.'

Mohan dropped on to the divan. With his long legs stuck out before him and his chin sunk on his chest, he stared out into the dusk. There was a silence.

It was broken at last by the entrance of Rabindra, who put a tray with palm-wine before him. Mohan poured out four glasses, and took one for himself. After drinking he turned to Jali and said: 'I'm not sure that we ought to let you stay here. — Damayanti, what do you think?'

Damayanti gave a smile and rose to her feet. 'Jali says he wants to stay.' She went up to Mohan and laid a hand on his shoulder. 'As you are likely to spend most of the night in the meeting-room . . .'

Mohan seemed not to hear, then abruptly he got up, and together they went into the house.

Jali looked at Rabindra, met his eyes, and felt encouraged to speak. 'I prefer life here to life at the Palace,' he said.

Rabindra smiled.

'I want you to tell me how it began. Is the Guru responsible?'

'Yes. But the Guru never says: "You should do this, you should



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do that." The Prince and Princess made this life for themselves.' He stopped, shook his head sadly, and began to collect the glasses and put them back on the tray.

'Why do you shake your head?'

'I wish the Guru were here.'

'What could he do?'

Rabindra took the tray into the house and Jali followed him. Then he fetched a lamp from the next room, set it down on the table, and by its light looked into Jali's face thoughtfully.

'I am afraid for the Prince,' he said. 'This attack on the Gujars has angered him — and no wonder! I am afraid that his patience will be exhausted; and that is what his enemies are waiting for.'

'Who are his enemies?'

Rabindra made no answer, but he said: 'There is trouble brewing.'

'Trouble has already come, hasn't it? There is famine, war, cholera, but . . . that is nothing new.'

'No. That is nothing new.' Rabindra gave a short laugh. 'But here is something new. Since when have poor, ignorant peasants had muskets, bullets, and gunpowder?'

Jali stared and said nothing.

'I am not easy in my mind. Two or three times lately I have spoken to the Prince, and once to the Princess; but it is difficult for me to speak.'

'Why is it difficult?'

Rabindra frowned again. 'The Rajah is the Prince's brother.'

'Well, what of it? You don't, surely, accuse the Rajah . . .?'

Rabindra's face was stony. 'This is a complicated matter. The Rajah cannot be called a bad man . . .'

'No. Certainly not.'

'Nor a stupid man.'

'No — nor that either.'

'And yet he is the upholder of evils and stupidities. If I were to tell him that the guns used against the Gujars came from the Palace he would not believe me. And yet it is a fact, and he ought to know it.'

After a minute, Jali said: 'I suppose you are certain of what you say, but I can't understand what the Rajah — or anyone else in the Palace — Moti Singh, for instance — has to gain from this attack on the Gujars. Have you told the Prince what you have just told me?'

'No, in one sense it isn't necessary, because in his heart he knows

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what I know. And from another point of view it would be worse than useless, because it might provoke him to do something rash.'

Jali stared at Rabindra helplessly. A chill had descended upon him. He was searching for words — there were a dozen questions he wanted to ask — when Rabindra said quickly, 'I hear someone,' and moved towards the front door. Jali followed him, and saw a man standing outside. After a brief exchange Rabindra ushered him in. There was a lamp in the hall, and Jali recognized the man at once. It was one of his mother's servants.

AN hour later, having heard what the man had to tell him, Jali left the house, and, moved by a desire for complete solitude, took the path over the grassy plain. The night was warm and windless, the sky cloudy with a few low lights still hanging in the west. For a long time he walked straight ahead, his eyes fixed upon the ground; and so deeply did thoughts of his father possess him that it was as though he had stepped for a while outside the stream of his own life. When at last he stopped and looked about him the whole sky was grey with cloud, but somewhere behind there was a moon which sent enough light through to make the landscape darkly visible.

He had been thinking of his father as one thinks of a person who has just died, and he was now drawn close to him in the kind of understanding which waits until it is summoned forth by death. Vaguely he realized now that in the passing of this last hour he had moved a step forward out of his immaturity. He had walked for a little while beside Rajah Amar not merely as a son but as a fellow-traveller on the road of life. And he was consumed by that desire which sweeps over one — only when it is too late — to tell the other: 'Now I am with you, now I understand.' Eagerly, too, he would have told his father what his own purpose was. 'I, too, am committed,' he would have explained, 'I, too, have set out!'

For if anything had been needed to make resolute his determination to follow in the way of Mohan and Damayanti, it was this. He was determined to make their inspiration his own and to act upon it as they did.

Beyond this he could see nothing; although, indeed, as he trudged back across the plain, he peered into the future most anxiously. His efforts had no other result than to plunge him into discouragement. For now, whichever way he looked, memories of the Palace of Daulatpur would rise up to chill him. The ironical lights in Lakshmi's eyes, the placid tones of Bhoj's voice, seemed to him now to be tokens of an unshakable strength. He despaired not only for Mohan and Damayanti here but for himself at Vidyapur. For, although it was true that his conditions at home would be quite different, the enemy was always the same.

For some time the glow of camp-fires had been visible in the dis-

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tance, and now, as he drew nearer to the house, he saw groups of peasants assembled outside the meeting-room, the door of which was crowded with men who were passing in and out. By the light of the fires the small black figures looked like insects. They ran here and there on the grass which was half encircled by a tall bank of trees. In the morning he had noticed this leafy bay as a place of great beauty. 'But to-morrow,' he reflected, 'that beauty will be defaced. A filthy litter will be lying everywhere, the leaves upon those branches will be scorched, charred holes will be burnt into the grass.'

Approaching the open door of the meeting-room, he looked in. The place was brightly lit, and, squatting in a semi-circle on the floor, were twenty or thirty peasants whom he guessed to be the head men of neighbouring villages. Cross-legged on the ground among them was Mohan, and he, like the rest, had his eyes fixed upon a middle-aged man who appeared to be making a speech. Only no coherent words issued from the speaker's mouth. His fist was raised as if he were driving home an argument, he was leaning forward, his eyes bloodshot, his lips quivering, but no utterance came. This grunting, groaning speechlessness was painful to witness, and the audience stirred and muttered. Then a woman, evidently his wife, stepped to his side and from her mouth words gushed forth in a torrent. The man tried to push her back, but several voices cried out: 'Let the woman speak! At least she has a tongue.'

While his wife was holding the floor, the man turned his head this way and that, staring with eyes that understood nothing. Everything here was strange. Indeed, everything in the world was strange to him except the soil, and the labour of tilling it. The drag of the earth was visible not only in his shoulders and arms, but in his eyelids and the sag of his jaw. Toil lay like heavy chains upon him; his mind could not lift itself even in this moment of extremity. What had he learnt to know in the forty years of his life? The earthen walls and the mud floor of a hut, with a hoe leaning in the corner. And now he was called upon to lift his mind from the earth, to speak, to explain, to save himself; and he could not.

Jali was staring at him in fascination, when he heard a voice at his side. 'That's Lalu,' Rabindra whispered, 'from Nurabad. The tax-collectors arrived there this morning. He has been having a bad time, and we are trying to find out from him how the Emperor's new system works. But he understands nothing except that they have taken practically everything that he has — his store of millet,

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his goats, his one copper pan — and they say that he still owes them forty pice. Look how anxiously the others are listening! their turn will come soon; and if they are as unprepared as Lalu their lot will be the same.'

Lalu's wife was still speaking. She was a stoutly-built, coarse-looking woman, far gone in pregnancy, who faced her audience with a truculent air. But, although voluble, she was unable to give information of any value. Questions were flung at her, but she disregarded them. Jali saw a frown of impatience gather on several faces, and presently Mohan and the man squatting on his right began to converse together in low tones. Similar conversations sprang up all round, but the woman instead of falling silent only spoke faster and louder.

The room was filled with a confusion of sound when someone pushed his way violently through the crowd by the door, and the next moment a tall man of about thirty with powerful shoulders took his stand in the centre of the floor. All conversation ceased, and a warm murmur welcomed the newcomer. 'Now we shall hear something!' said Rabindra with satisfaction. 'This is Takhu, the headman of Nurabad, and he is no fool.'

Something in Takhu's face moved Jali deeply. It was a simple, eager, generous face, and the eyes were bright with intelligence. Brushing the sweat from his brow with a large dirty hand, Takhu swept a smiling glance from right to left over the whole gathering and at once broke into speech. He gave a detailed description of the procedure of the tax-collectors as he had observed it during the better part of the day, but unfortunately what Takhu had observed and understood was little more than the external details, not their meaning. 'Then the small tax-collector with the blue turban opened another big book and wrote down four figures in a row; one was large and one small, the other two were middle-size. Then he thought for a minute and said to Miraj Din: "You owe His Imperial Majesty four hundred pice."' The circle of listeners soon began to ask questions, and presently they were shaking their heads. What did these figures mean? The tax-collectors had always been extortionate: they now appeared not only extortionate but mad. Why should Miraj Din, whose family was on the verge of starvation, be asked to pay four hundred pice which he did not possess, while Rama who was comparatively prosperous had got off with three hundred and fifty? Questions and looks of appeal were thrown at

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Mohan more insistently than before. 'This is the kind of thing *he* understands,' Jali heard said. 'Let *him* explain.' And the gaunt old man on Mohan's left kept nudging him in the ribs with a skinny elbow — very much to Mohan's annoyance, for he was busily turning over the pages of a copy of Akbar's new edicts, and his face showed him to be sharing in the general perplexity. In the meantime Lalu and Takhu fell to comparing notes, and Jali was near enough to hear what they said. To his surprise Lalu had not only found his tongue but was showing a good deal of intelligence. Jali listened attentively, and once or twice he succeeded in taking his meaning when Takhu had failed. So he stepped forward and acted as interpreter. From now on he was completely absorbed in what he was doing. The atmosphere was tense, every intelligence stretched to its furthest capacity. For indeed, the questions at issue were questions of life and death.

Time went by; and when he came back to himself it was to realize that Rabindra was pulling at his arm and nodding towards the open door. He followed, not without reluctance, and outside looked up into the other's face inquiringly.

Rabindra raised an arm and pointed. 'The Princess is there and wants you to have supper with her.'

Jali looked across the open space and saw Damayanti and Savriti seated on a little mound on the edge of the wood. Between him and them was the ragged crowd of women and children now busy with an evening meal which filled the air with its odours. Mother and daughter were talking with great animation, and they, too, were eating while they talked. It was visible even at this distance that Savriti was in a state of enjoyable excitement. To be sitting up far beyond her usual bed-time, to be picnicking by the light of bonfires under the trees, and above all to be taking part in so great an affair as this — all its stir and strangeness spread out beneath her eyes — what, indeed, could be more delightful?

Threading his way through the crowd Jali went up to Damayanti and threw himself down on the ground beside her. She began to help him to rice and cardamoms, but Savitri took the wooden platter from her. 'No, no! this is my party. You must let me do everything.'

For a while the conversation, too, remained all in the hands of Savitri, and Jali contented himself with eating and drinking — but more to please the child than to satisfy a genuine hunger. His mind

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and heart were full to overflowing, and, as he looked across at Damayanti, he longed to unburden himself to her. Perhaps she saw this, for presently she said: 'Savitri, look at poor Rabindra over there! He needs your help badly. Why don't you . . .?' But Savitri had already leapt to her feet and was off.

Damayanti leant forward to look into his face. 'I hope that messenger didn't bring you bad news?'

'No.' And in a few words he told her what the message had been. He told her, too, what thoughts had accompanied him on his lonely walk, and here again a very few words were sufficient. Most of the doubts and misgivings upon which he had paused had lost their importance, for what he felt now was the clutch of a vital interest, a direct spontaneous impulse that had no need to explain or justify itself. He said: 'It now seems to me like this: if one sees a man struggling at the bottom of a well one is moved to do all one can to pull him out. If a man is starving one's natural impulse is to share one's food with him. Surely, it's only on second thoughts that people don't do these things? Society seems to me to be like an organized system of rather mean, second thoughts. In theory, no doubt, society helps men to help one another, but actually it provides every man with arguments for helping himself and not helping others.' He looked up at her with puzzled eyes. 'Am I talking nonsense? Can it really be as simple as this?'

'Yes.' She nodded and smiled. 'I really think it's as simple as that — when you reduce it to its essence. But . . .'

'But what?'

'Well, simple things are not necessarily easy.'

'Do I seem to you very childish?'

'No. But when you begin trying to put your ideas into practice. . . '

'I shall fail. Yes, that I can well believe.'

'She smiled. 'The world is not going to change in a day.'

'All the same, you and Mohan are changing a little bit of it.'

'Not even that!' She shook her head. 'I mean not permanently. This attempt of ours is bound to end in failure.'

'Why?'

'Because it is, in a sense, premature. But that doesn't mean that the attempt ought not to be made. People must go on making attempts. Otherwise there will never be any change at all.'

She spoke these last words rather hurriedly, at the same time rising to her feet, and Jali following the direction of her gaze, saw

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that something was happening in one of the fire-lit groups. Both Savitri and Rabindra had gathered there; and now a wailing went up which showed that a death had taken place.

'It's a baby,' said Damayanti over her shoulder. 'It was very ill. I knew it had to die.' And she hurried down the little mound towards the wailing women.

For a while Jali remained where he was. Damayanti's words had invigorated him, for the spirit they breathed was just that which he had so recently discovered in himself. In a dream he watched the scene before him. Here and there resinous branches had been thrown on to the fires to make a blaze, and, as the dark leaves crackled and exploded, columns of golden sparks shot up into the air. The firelight shone ruddily upon faces that were some smiling and some vacant, some frowning and some sad.

When he returned to the meeting-room it was to find that progress had been made. It had come to light that the tax-collectors were misreading certain clauses in Akbar's ordinance. But, unfortunately, the new laws, even in their correct interpretation, were likely to be no less oppressive than the old. As soon as this was understood, gloom gathered over the assembly, and deepened, here and there, into something resembling despair. Long periods of silence alternated with mutterings among the different groups. Mohan, looking very harassed, was still turning over the pages of the Imperial Decree; he seemed helpless to combat the general despondency.

Jali's heart went out to him. It was not difficult to see that he was ill-equipped for struggle on this particular ground. Coolness and calculation were needed here, and Mohan by all appearances had not even got a very clear head. The young man was about to move across to his side, when a middle-aged peasant, who seemed comparatively well-to-do, got up and begged leave to speak. His action provoked a low murmur, as if some at least of those present knew what was about to take place. Speaking in a harsh, matter-of-fact voice, Umed Singh — for that was his name — reminded the company that of the four thousand gold mohurs allowed yearly to Mohan by Bhoj it had been decided that Mohan should keep two hundred for himself. This meant that he had over one-half of a gold mohur to spend on every day of the year. That was too much — especially now when everybody else was being brought even nearer to starvation than before. He suggested that the allowance be reduced by one-half; and, even so, Mohan would remain the wealth-



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iest man in the room in spite of the fact that he did not, like the others, have to toil every day in the fields.

At the opening of Umed Singh's speech a deep flush had spread over Mohan's face, but it had gradually subsided; and he had continued to listen with a calm attention that betrayed nothing of his inner feelings. All eyes were fixed upon him, and when Umed Singh sat down again, a deep silence of expectancy reigned. Looking round the circle of eager faces Jali was filled with indignation, for the majority showed all too clearly that the hope of receiving a few extra pice left little room for any other thought.

Having waited a few moments to see if anyone else wished to speak, Mohan got up. There was nothing in the tone of his voice or in his manner to show that he was either angry or disappointed. His reply, made in a few brief sentences, was to the effect that seven years ago he had given over to those present the responsibility of apportioning the money allowed to him by Rajah Bhoj, and that he had no desire to alter that arrangement. Indeed, he did not consider that he had any right to do so. In order, then, to leave them freer to discuss a new apportionment he would withdraw. And with that he turned and walked out of the room.

For a few moments no one spoke, no one stirred. Then a great clamour arose. 'Why was that jackal Umed Singh allowed to speak? Shame has been put upon us. Now we shall have to crawl like beaten dogs. The Prince is angry, and the fault is Umed Singh's. Turn the jackal out of the room! — Who knows what the Prince in his anger will not do? No, no! The Prince is a good man, but he is ashamed of us, and we have reason to hide our heads. Ahi! ahi! this is a day of calamity. The Prince will now abandon us completely. Thrash Umed Singh! Thrash him! and then the Prince will see we are not of his thinking. — For the sake of a few more pice we risk losing everything. — What are a few pice compared to a friend? — Yes, the Prince was a friend, but now we have insulted him.'

Sick at heart, and feeling that he had no place here, Jali stepped out into the night. The fires had now sunk low, and those around them were huddling down to sleep. Suddenly conscious of a great fatigue the young man went up to his room.

THE next morning Jali was down early and took his morning meal with Rabindra. From him he learnt that Umed had been expelled from the meeting and that Mohan had yielded to entreaties that he should return. All present had then declared with one voice that they had no wish to alter Mohan's allowance. But to this the latter had replied that it had been his intention — only Umed Singh had forestalled him — to say that he wanted to bear his share of any new burden that might fall on the others. He asked that the matter should be considered again as soon as the effect of the new taxes became better known, and that Umed Singh should be invited to return when the next meeting took place. 'They all went away feeling thoroughly ashamed of themselves,' concluded Rabindra. 'And their respect for the Prince is even greater than before.'

Cheered by this news, Jali went out and joined Savitri in a ramble about the garden and the woods behind the house. On his return he found Damayanti in the veranda and lost no time in telling her how glad he was that the peasants had found the grace to be ashamed of themselves.

She was looking depressed, and while he was speaking she shook her head. 'Unfortunately, it doesn't do any good to make people feel ashamed of themselves. At least not in that way. However . . .'

'But, surely, the evening ended not too badly?'

'No, not too badly.' She hesitated, then said: 'Don't let's think about it any more.' A moment later Mohan appeared in the doorway. On his face there was a look of amusement; he had the air of a man who has something to announce. After closing the door carefully behind him, he said in a loud whisper: 'Moti Singh is here!'

'Moti Singh!'

Mohan pointed in the direction of the guest-room. 'Yes, there! He is washing off the dust of his journey.'

'But — what does this mean?'

With a smile and a shrug Mohan sat down and began to eat some grapes that were on the table. 'My dear, I have no idea.'

Damayanti turned to Jali. 'Never in his life before has Moti Singh been here. He dislikes us both very much. — Mohan, what

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can it mean? What did he give as his reason for coming? He must have said something to account for it.'

'It appears that the Sesodia has withdrawn his invitation to Bhoj and Lakshmi. They had already started and were about ten miles outside the town when a messenger from the Sesodia met them and said: "No, no! we don't want you, after all."'

Damayanti was speechless for a moment, then, 'You're joking!' she cried.

Mohan shook his head. 'I'm telling you what Moti Singh told me. — It's not a joke, although funny.'

'Mohan! It's not funny. What are Bhoj and Lakshmi feeling about it?'

'A mild surprise, I suppose.'

Damayanti turned to Jali. 'If this has really happened in the way Mohan has described, I simply can't imagine what they are feeling. The Sesodia, you know, is the most important man in all India — I mean socially. His wife is Lakshmi's cousin, and has always disliked her. Madasena would welcome any excuse for snubbing Lakshmi and this must mean that she has found an excuse.' Here Damayanti paused, then faced round again. 'Mohan, please pay attention! The fact that Moti Singh has come here like this suggests that *we* are involved. Did he hint at that?'

'No — unless you count as a hint . . .'

'What?'

'The solemn and reproachful looks that he kept giving me.'

'Oh! He gave you reproachful looks?'

'Yes. But that might have been because I was laughing. Anyhow, we shall soon hear all about it.'

Damayanti took thought. 'I think you ought to see him alone — at any rate, at first.'

'Very well!'

'And come back as quickly as you can.'

Mohan rose with a grin. 'You mustn't expect me back for two or three hours. Dear old Moti and I will be sitting over our palm-wine and cracking jokes until God knows when. You don't want to hurry us, do you?'

After the door had closed there was a brief silence; then Damayanti said: 'It may seem ridiculous to treat this cancelled visit as a thing of importance; but, I assure you, its possible effects . . .'

Jali's eyes remained fixed upon her questioningly.

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'All these years,' she went on in a low voice, I have been dreading a breach between Mohan and Bhoj. You see, although so different in nature, they are very fond of one another. And now . . .' Lifting her head, she gave him a long, thoughtful look. 'Would you like me to tell you about it?'

'Please!' said Jali eagerly.

'Mohan and I married nine years ago. After our marriage we settled down in the Summer Palace. Bhoj and Lakshmi thought us rather eccentric in our mode of life, but nothing more than that. The Guru's influence was not so strong or widespread then, nor had we or Bhoj realized what the Guru's teaching meant. India has always been full of holy men preaching the religion of freedom and equality, but without producing any *practical* results. It was not until we moved here and began putting the Guru's ideas properly into practice that Bhoj and Lakshmi came to understand that those ideas were different — and dangerous.'

Jali smiled. 'I understand. There is no danger in religion so long as it doesn't touch upon the question of money.'

'All the same, the Guru never talks about money — or politics. He does nothing more than point out that friendship calls for friendliness. If friendly behaviour is quite different from ordinary behaviour, that is not his fault. All that we are doing here is to try to treat our neighbours as friends. When Mohan received four thousand gold mohurs from Bhoj, the natural and friendly thing for him to do was to share that money with his friends here, who were all on the verge of starvation.'

Jali considered this; and he was still considering it when Mohan reappeared. His face had changed. It wore a look that caused the young man to glance rapidly at Damayanti, and he saw anxiety, if not fear, in her eyes.

Mohan again closed the door carefully behind him, then he said: 'Moti Singh stopped at the Summer Palace on his way here, and he had the impertinence to give orders that the wounded Gujars should be moved out of the house.'

Damayanti drew a deep breath. 'Were those orders carried out?'

'No. They were not. Our men saw to it that nothing should be changed. And Moti Singh rode on.'

Mohan sat down; they continued to look at one another.

'Does he claim to have any authority from Bhoj?' she said at last.

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'I think he claims to have had vague instructions — nothing definite. I refrained from inquiring too closely.' He gave a little laugh. 'The truth is that Bhoj and Lakshmi, having just been turned back by the Sesodia's messenger, were thinking about nothing but that.'

'What excuse did the Sesodia give?'

'He declared that the country through which they would have to pass is in such a disturbed condition that travel is unsafe — at least for people like Bhoj.'

'I see. He is aiming a blow at us.'

'Exactly! He says that the "subversive influences" at work in the State of Daulatpur have already demoralized his own peasants so much that he can't be responsible for their behaviour. Of course that's all nonsense, and he knows that Bhoj knows that it's nonsense. This is his way of giving him a hint.'

The hot light died out of Damayanti's eyes; she covered them with her hands. 'Oh, Mohan!' she murmured.

'He goes on to promise Bhoj another invitation at a later date — as soon as the country becomes safer.'

'I see.'

Mohan said no more. His face was set; he stared straight before him.

The silence lasted for several minutes. At last Damayanti made a little sound as if she were about to speak, but she checked herself, and checked at the same time a half movement in Mohan's direction. He gave a brief smile and said: 'I left Moti Singh hurriedly because I felt that in another moment I should lose my temper.'

She drew a deep breath. 'Yes, when first you came in, my heart sank. I was afraid . . .'

'No.' He shook his head. 'I have learnt something in these last seven years.'

After a pause, during which she seemed to have gone very far in thought, she brought herself back with a sigh, and, turning quickly to Mohan, said: 'But what brought Moti Singh here? What did he actually want?'

'Ah!' Mohan gave a brief laugh. 'It took me some little time to find that out. But I got it out of him at last. He wants me to persuade the Guru to leave the country. He has been telling Bhoj that nothing will satisfy the Sesodia except the expulsion of the Guru.'

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‘Or of us.’

Mohan winced, then repeated through his teeth: ‘Yes. Or of us. — That might be enough. It would look like a heavy defeat for the Guru.’

Silence fell again. And now they were not even looking at one another. Damayanti’s eyes were fixed upon the distance; Mohan, his elbows on his knees, was staring at the ground. But when he next spoke it was as if out of a single, shared reverie. ‘After all, if the worst comes to the worst . . .’

And her lips finished the sentence. ‘We can go. Yes, it won’t be the end of everything.’

A little later, sitting by the pool of Vishnu, Jali stared at the sleeping god with unseeing eyes. No breath ruffled the water, the convolvulus sprays hung motionless, nothing moved except the small green lizards which were running up and down on the warm stone. He was sitting where Damayanti had sat on that first day, when her sheets of manuscript had blown into the water. The story of her life! Well, he reflected sadly, a miserable chapter was being added to it now.

On his way back he paused on the edge of the lawn, and looked across at the house. It was of a familiar pattern, built up out of solid beams of unpainted wood, with a roof of burnt tiles. He liked its long, low front, and the way the eaves turned up at the corners in the fashion of the country. With its wooden shutters and wooden steps, its pots of basil and marigold, and the golden pumpkins standing here and there upon the balcony, it had a homeliness that he found very endearing.

The veranda was empty, but as he approached it Rabindra appeared and came down the steps. Mohan, he said, had decided to go to Daulatpur that very afternoon, taking Moti Singh back with him. ‘They will go straight to the Palace together. That is the only way to make sure that the Rajah doesn’t receive a garbled account of everything.’

Jali nodded.

‘They will start as soon as they have had something to eat.’

Jali went on into the house, and was somewhat disconcerted at finding himself alone in the room with Moti Singh. The man was looking grave, preoccupied, and at the same time, bored. He returned Jali’s civilities absently, and then, turning away, continued

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to wander about the room. In an abstracted way he picked up this and that object, stared at it with a complete lack of interest, and put it down again. Jali watched him out of the corner of his eye with deep curiosity. Moti Singh had the appearance and manners of a well-trained secretary, and both Bhoj and Lakshmi had treated him as such. But his personality, Jali now realized, was by no means negligible. His steady, wary gaze, deliberate movements, and quiet confident utterance were those of a man by nature on his guard against his fellow-men, and by experience confident of getting the better of them. To hear him talk one would believe that he was fifty; to look at him it was hard to credit him with more than twenty-five years.

Presently Mohan and Damayanti came in and a meal was served, during which Moti Singh maintained a cold and cautious politeness. His manner with Bhoj and Lakshmi had always been cautious, but not so cold as this. He had a fashion of combining self-assurance with a hesitating — and even deferential — way of speech. He was never emphatic, nor even had the appearance of taking any interest in what he was saying, and yet he managed to give the impression that his remarks were valuable — even when they were not. On one occasion only did a certain warmth creep into his voice, and that was when he had to make mention of the Sesodia's withdrawal of his invitation. Then, as if to excuse himself for so much as alluding to that enormity, he added in an aside that of course the Sesodia's action had only a *political* significance.

At the last moment Damayanti decided to accompany Mohan to the edge of the tableland, and invited Jali to come too. It was, accordingly, a party of five that set out: Mohan and Moti Singh in front, Damayanti and Jali some little distance behind, and Rabindra in the rear. The afternoon was bright and windy. Large, white clouds were driving across the sky, and patches of shadow running swiftly over the grass. When the cliff was reached everyone halted, and while Damayanti was exchanging a few last words with Mohan, Jali gazed down on to the plain. Beneath his feet the park of the Summer Palace lay outspread, beyond stretched mile upon mile of green cultivated land, and in the blue distance lay the town of Daulatpur. As he looked at the enormous Palace of Rajah Bhoj in its midst, his thoughts turned to an ancient ant-hill on a piece of waste land behind the stables at home. That ant-hill was, indeed, a noble pile. Many hundreds of years old,

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towered and turreted, spacious and intricate, it bore witness to the well-ordered diligence of countless generations. There was certainly no palace in all India that could vie with it as a monument testifying to social stability and traditions faithfully upheld. Perhaps, Jali now reflected, that was why, as a child, he used to take an irreverent pleasure in poking at it with a stick.



THE next few days went by very quietly at Hawa Ghar. Much of Damayanti's time was taken up by the peasants, and, while she was thus occupied, Jali spent many hours by himself, wandering about on the wide grassland or in the woods behind the house.

He found his thoughts turning insistently in the direction of the Palace; and after a while he gave in to this obsession with a kind of angry pleasure. It served to distract him from his love for Damayanti. Of that he could not think without falling into a state of gloom, which was only too often coloured by jealousy. He was jealous, not of Mohan particularly, but of everything that occupied her outward or inward life. He saw her life as full and complete without him, whereas his without her stretched out before him most drearily.

Every morning he inquired what news had come from Mohan, and day after day her replies were discouraging. 'But, after all, things might be worse,' she generally added, 'Moti Singh's attempts to force an issue have failed so far.'

Jali would listen with a scowl on his face. He had the greatest difficulty in not bursting out in a tirade.

One morning she said: 'I confess I'm getting more anxious. Bhoj and the Sesodia go on exchanging polite letters, but no headway is being made. The Sesodia keeps on repeating how eager he is that the visit should take place; but the date remains unfixed. And I'm afraid it now looks as if the date were likely to remain unfixed until Bhoj gives way.'

'On what point has he to give way?'

'That remains rather vague. The Sesodia continues to talk about "subversive influences", and he has formed an association of Rajahs and Grandees which he wants Bhoj to join. This association apparently includes rich merchants as well — in fact, anyone who has wealth and power. Moti Singh doesn't altogether approve of the admission of the merchant-class, but he presses Bhoj to join all the same. Mohan is strongly against the association. There is a great deal of manœuvring going on; and Lakshmi is becoming very impatient.'

'Impatient to go on that visit?'

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'Yes. I mean she would be very sorry to quarrel with the Sesodia. To keep on good terms with him and his friends — who are also her friends — means a great deal to her. It would be rather hard on her and Bhoj, she feels, if they were made to suffer for holding opinions which they don't in fact hold. But Bhoj is not inclined to give in yet. He has a great deal of sagacity. He knows that Akbar is in sympathy with the masses and hostile to the Rajahs. I think Bhoj has an intuition that in the long run his present tolerance of the Guru may turn to his advantage.'

'And Lakshmi? She thinks differently?'

'Lakshmi doesn't take long views. She sees no reason at the moment for risking a loss of position, or popularity, or prestige.'

Jali laughed. 'Her finger is always on the pulse of her little circle of friends. I have noticed that. And, as you say, why should she risk unpopularity? People outside her world have no real existence for her. The way they live — or die — is no business of hers.'

'Well! She doesn't see why she should make personal sacrifices for the sake of Mohan's odd and inconvenient ideas. She would say that if there is a right and a wrong in the matter, the probabilities are that the world is right and Mohan wrong.'

Damayanti spoke with directness but without animosity. Jali, on the other hand, was breathing fast, and the blood had risen to his head. For a moment their looks met; then, turning away, he said: 'If *you* are able to remain cool, *I* ought to be able to manage it. After all, it is only a few days ago that I was persuading myself, as Bhoj does, that the existing state of things is ordained by Nature and approved by God. Bhoj thinks that for all time there should be a few very wise and rich and cultured men (like himself) at the top of society, and progressively less wisdom, and less wealth, and less culture as you go down the social scale. He would not have society arranged differently for anything in the world. And as for Moti Singh, that creature . . .' He broke off.

'My dear,' said Damayanti, 'I wish you would talk to the Guru about these things, as I have.'

'I wish I could.'

She studied him for a moment in silence, then murmured: 'I remember his once saying that it was better to hate and to get beyond one's hatred, than never to awaken to hatred at all.'

Jali flushed more deeply still. 'I am still far from getting beyond my hatred,' he replied.

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Another week went by, and Mohan's reports became not better but worse. Moti Singh was now stirring up the well-to-do townsmen, the *baniya* class, against the common people, and more especially against the Guru. The rumour had been spread about that the Guru had formed a secret society for the assassination of the rich and the seizing of their wealth.

Jali's face grew dark as he listened to this news. He was still considering it in silence, when Damayanti laid down her letter with a little cry of distress. 'Randhir has died!' she exclaimed.

'Died? — of cholera?'

'Yes. Of cholera.'

For a minute both remained still. Damayanti was staring straight before her, and her face was sad. 'I'm sorry,' she said at last. 'I was very fond of Randhir — and so was Mohan.'

Pushing the letters away from her, she got up, walked to the edge of the veranda, and looked out. Jali's eyes followed her and rested on her thoughtfully.

'I should like to ask you a question,' he said at last. 'Wasn't Randhir's death to be expected?'

'Yes. I suppose so.'

He frowned, began to speak, then checked himself. Randhir's face had taken shape in his mind's eye, and behind its careless smile he saw — more clearly than ever before — a spirit lost in hopelessness. But why had Randhir been hopeless? What had happened to poison the springs of life in him?

'I want to ask you another question,' he blurted out suddenly. 'In your opinion, was Randhir's death a good death? I mean, do you think it was admirable? or required?'

'One could hardly say "required".'

'But admirable?'

'I admired Randhir. So did Mohan.'

Jali kept silence.

After a moment she returned to her seat and again picked up her letters. 'There is a chance that the Guru may come here,' she said. 'He isn't well, and a rest would do him good. — Oh, and listen to this! It's almost comic. Moti Singh is still keeping up his attempts to get the wounded Gujars turned out of the Summer Palace!'

Jali fairly ground his teeth. 'By all the gods! That man is scarcely human.'

She laughed. 'On the contrary, all too human. To him Bhoj and

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Lakshmi are as gods. The defence of the existing state of things is his religion.'

'And what is the religion of Bhoj and Lakshmi?'

Damayanti made no reply.

'It seems to me,' said Jali with vicious deliberation, 'that their god is one who calls for human sacrifice. Rajah Randhir offered himself on that altar.'

She gave him a quick look, then said: 'I can see what you mean, but you are unfair. Randhir was brought up with certain traditions. He was a Rajput; it was in his blood.'

'It's not his chivalry nor his courage that I am attacking; it's the uses to which he was trained to put them. I am thinking of what you told me about his mother the other day.'

'What did I say?'

'You said she was one of the proudest and most conventional old women you had ever met. She had an exquisite gentleness of manner, but thought nothing of having two or three of her slaves flogged nearly to death every day. Her three sons all respected and adored her. The two others died young, while she was still alive: one in a tiger-hunt, the other in a duel.'

Damayanti nodded.

'Well, as I see things, Randhir's mother — and wife — are responsible for this death of his. He certainly didn't die for Akbar, for he had a contempt, as you know, for Akbar personally, and was blind to the greatness in him. Nor had he any preference as between Salim and Daniyal. What, then, did Randhir die for? For the sake of making a fine gesture. Not that he really believed in fine gestures. But his mother did, and so does Rancee Devi. He offered himself as a sacrifice to their gods. He died because the memory of his mother and the eyes of his wife drove him to it.'

'I'm afraid there is truth in what you say.' Damayanti looked at him fixedly. 'But you are speaking out of bitterness and anger.'

'I suppose I am.'

They continued to regard one another with intentness; then Damayanti smiled and said: 'The Guru and I have talked about this kind of thing a good deal. You mustn't suppose that I haven't been through times of great bitterness — and Mohan too. But it's no good being angry with one particular person when so many are to blame, nor is it any good being angry with a whole class; so one is reduced to not being angry at all.'

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‘What does the Guru think about — about the Palace?’

‘One of the things he has pointed out to me about it is the influence of the women there. It is they who set the tone. Female values reign. And that, he says, is always bad’

‘And you agree?’

‘Yes, I think I do. The women pretend that their husbands are lords and masters, but that is only make-believe. You will hear Lakshmi say: “I should like to come, but I must ask Bhoj if he can spare me.” Even Ranee Devi herself used to say: “Randhir won’t let me; he thinks . . .”’

‘Yes, I’ve heard them!’

‘The women, unfortunately, have the stronger characters. The men are brought up from babyhood to defer to feminine standards, — to respect only prestige. And if, in later life, a few of them become aware that something is wrong, they shrug and give up.’

‘It isn’t like that in my father’s Court’

She smiled. ‘Well, you were luckier in your upbringing than Mohan — or me.’

Jali got up and began to walk up and down. ‘May I tell you what I feel?’ And then, as she nodded, he went on. ‘It seems to me that in Bhoj and Randhir and the others something is lacking — not courage, not exactly character — something more common and necessary. Perhaps the Guru knows what it is. I can’t define it. But, as the Guru says, when *that* is lacking a spiritual blight sets in.’ He stopped and looked into Damayanti’s eyes questioningly

‘Go on!’ The little laugh she gave was entirely reassuring. ‘You won’t offend me.’

‘Well! What it comes to, I suppose, is this: just as I like and admire Mohan’s way of thought and feeling, so I despise Bhoj’s. To take an instance, my mother, Hari, and Gokal debated together for a long time before making use of the Sesodia’s abandoned castle, so much did they dislike the idea of coming even into indirect contact with anyone so cruel and so vicious. They wouldn’t have gone there except under pressure of sheer necessity. Yet, because the Sesodia is the Sesodia, Bhoj and Lakshmi are longing to visit him and ready to do almost anything to keep on good terms with him. And in order to remain blind to their own worldliness they have to persuade themselves that they embody certain qualities of great worth which would disappear were they to disappear, or even to lose their privileges. They have to regard themselves as

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superior beings and to persuade the rest of mankind to regard them as such. But — are they really superior beings? And don't they enormously over-estimate their culture, their graces, the value they add to human life as a whole?"

Damayanti replied quickly: 'The point is this: all those graces become worthless — become tainted — in the absence of a certain saving grace which they lack.'

'What is it?'

She smiled and gave a shrug. 'My dear, it is very hard to define. Sometimes it looks like a lack of magnanimity, of generous feeling. Sometimes it looks like blindness, wrong-headedness, self-deception. — You see, I am being quite frank with you! And you see, too, that I go as far as you do.'

'Then it is fair to say that Bhoj is to blame for thinking as he does. It is fair to say that he ought to know better?'

She was silent, staring before her with a frown.

Jali sat down. His face was now very flushed and his hands trembling. 'I *must* tell you what I think,' he said huskily. 'It seems to me that at the Palace I belonged to a little group of people who, while apparently living lives of dignity, self-discipline, and public-spiritedness, were really living in an ignoble cause. I feel that in all of them the intelligence of the heart has been suffocated, so that their secret lives have become self-defensive, mean, and calculating.'

Damayanti smiled sadly. 'I should put it rather differently. I should say that Bhoj's very anxiety to be worthy of his position is tainted by the sneaking consciousness that that position ought not to exist at all. His life is spent in an effort to compensate with virtues, graces, and charities for something to which he knows he has no right.'

'And Lakshmi?'

'I don't know.'

'But it is very important to know. The women count for so much. Can't you help me?'

She smiled. 'I really don't know. If the women are largely responsible for that way of life and thought, they are not conscious of it. They believe themselves to be only accepting it. It has for them the imposingness of something that is there, something strong, and inevitable, and real. I don't think many women have the kind of imagination the Guru has. They can't imagine a different world.'

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I know that it was a long, long time before I could; and then I only did because — I had to.'

'Why did you have to?'

'Ah!' she said, looking away into the distance, 'I should have to tell you my whole life to tell you that.'

'What I want to find out,' he went on doggedly, 'is why all those people attach such an exaggerated value to appearances. Why are they willing to die, and to send those whom they love to their death, for the sake of — what shall I call it? — the look of the thing? Why are they willing, too, to live, year in year out, lives of such effort and emptiness? Consider Lakshmi's life, for instance. She takes infinite trouble to surround herself with everything of the best — not only the best in books, pictures, and music, but also the best in opinions and ideas, and even in likes and dislikes. But none of this does she care about for its own sake. She wants it merely for self-decoration. The second-best — and still more the second-rate — that is her secret bugbear!'

Suddenly he stopped and was silent for a while. Then a look of illumination gathered upon his face. 'Do you know, I think I am beginning to understand! Surely, that cult is simply the cult of "first-rateness"? First-rateness! It's an absurd word, but I can think of no other, and you know what I mean by it. The devotees of the First-rate just pay tribute here, there, and everywhere. Take Lakshmi, for example! She pays tribute now to the lovely honesty of a child like Savriti, now to the successful caddishness of a Narayan, now to the goodness of the Guru, and now to the high birth of a villainous Sesodia. All these she measures by the same yardstick! All these she assesses in the same currency.'

'And that,' said Damayanti, smiling, 'is not at all "first-rate"!'

He laughed shortly. 'No! The cult of first-rateness can't be acknowledged — or even admitted to oneself. One lives on a secret plan of which one is ashamed.'

Damayanti continued to study him with thoughtful eyes, then turned her face away and said suddenly: 'Would you like to know what the Guru thinks about this?'

'Very much!'

'He would agree with what you have said. These people are afraid of appearing second-rate. They are afraid of each other. That is at the root of the trouble.'

'Yes!' exclaimed Jali. 'Yes!'

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‘He said that not to have the courage of one’s convictions was a very serious matter. I answered that many people were practically without “convictions” or else argued that there were many questions in life into which goodness just didn’t enter — questions to be decided by hard common sense, or simply by one’s sense of taste. There were so many standards in life to refer to that one became confused and frightened, and, finally, accepted the world’s opinion.’

‘And what did the Guru say to that?’

‘He said that one became confused only *after* one had given way to false shame about one’s real thoughts and feelings. He wasn’t assuming that everyone had definite, formulated convictions. He was referring to something much simpler than that — a thing that everybody had. It was a voice — the voice of one’s own spontaneous being: it was the preference, the choice, of one’s own personal spirit — before calculation had begun or the fear of ridicule had set in. Disloyalty to this divine principle within one corrupted the whole being.’

‘Yes!’ cried Jali again. ‘And what is more . . .’ He broke off, for Damayanti was staring over his shoulder, and turning to see what had distracted her attention, he saw Rabindra standing in the doorway, a look of eagerness upon his face.

‘The Prince!’ said Rabindra. ‘The Prince is just arriving!’

An hour later there was a knock at the door of Jali’s room and Rabindra came in. The young man, who had been asking himself, not without anxiety, what could be the cause of Mohan’s unexpected appearance, fastened questioning eyes upon him. Making an expressive grimace, Rabindra said: ‘Things are not going well in Daulatpur.’

They talked together for a few minutes; but Rabindra, who had come from the Summer Palace, had very little news to give, and presently he said: ‘The Princess is now alone again. Why don’t you go down to her? I have an idea that she would like to see you.’

Jali went down forthwith. Damayanti was sitting in the same place, and even in the same position, as before, but at once he felt that something had happened to trouble her.

‘How is Mohan?’ he inquired with abruptness, and added, ‘I thought he was looking worried.’

‘Mohan is worried.’



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It seemed her intention to say more, but instead of continuing she gazed up at him half-absently. 'I am going to ask you to do something for us,' she pronounced at last.

Jali's face lit up. 'Good!'

'Mohan says that matters are coming to a head. He discussed the situation with the Guru late last night, and the Guru has decided to go to Agra in order to make a personal appeal to Akbar. But, unfortunately, as I told you, he is not at all well; he has been overtaxing his strength; and I don't like . . .'

Jali broke in to say quickly: 'Let me go with him!'

'Will you really?' She gave a quick smile. 'That is what I was going to ask.'

'When will he start?'

'To-morrow.'

They paused; and Jali, his face suddenly clouding over, looked away.

She laid a hand on his arm. 'If all goes well you will be back in a fortnight.'

'And if all does not go well?'

She hesitated, then said: 'I don't know.'

'What will happen to you and Mohan here?'

'I don't know,' she said again.

A little later, as he was saddling his horse for a ride, he saw her and Mohan come out of the house and set off upon the familiar path across the grassland. They had failed to notice him by the stable door and as they went along side by side, their eyes cast down, their voices low, he followed them with a long, brooding gaze. For several minutes their figures remained visible against the dusky red of the evening sky; then abruptly turning away, he took his horse into the stable again and unsaddled it.

Outside the door was an old ilex which spread a deep shade. On the dry, bare ground at its foot he threw himself down and surrendered to the sense of loneliness that had overtaken him. With it there came, too, a superstitious fear. 'This is my last day at Hawa Ghar,' he said to himself. 'I shall never see it again.'

He had sunk deep into these gloomy forebodings when a rustling in the branches above made him look up with a start, and, peering through the dark leaves, he caught sight of Savriti's head and shoulders.

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'Come up here!' she called out to him. 'Come and see if you can catch me!'

He had played at this game with her once or twice before, but he certainly had no wish to play it now, and it was in a rather cross voice that he replied: 'No, Savriti, I can't!'

'Why not?'

He made no reply, and for several moments she remained motionless looking fixedly at him. Then without a word she began to climb down. He could hear her scuffling descent, and longed to take himself off, only that would have appeared unfriendly.

Crouching beside him in the gloom of the trailing branches, 'You are sad,' she said at once. 'I saw it.'

He shook his head.

'Yes, you are. Because you are going away. They have just told me.'

To this he said nothing. Her eyes, scanning his face, made him feel shy, — as if he were no older than she.

'But you won't be away long,' she continued comfortingly. 'Are you afraid you are going to feel lonely?'

He smiled and said: 'Yes.'

'But you are almost grown-up.'

'Don't grown-up people ever feel lonely — or sad?'

She considered. 'I suppose they do. But when they are married they have someone to comfort them.'

'That's true. But I'm not married. — And I don't want to marry.'

Abruptly she threw an arm round his neck and drew herself close up to him

For a minute he felt confused, almost angry, then he was touched by her sympathy and accepted it. He felt the difference in their ages to possess — for the moment at least — no importance.

'Savriti,' he said, after a pause, 'I think I should like to have you always there to comfort me.' And with that, gently disengaging himself, he got up and went into the house.

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## PART FIVE

### JALI'S JOURNAL

You suggested, Damayanti, when we said good-bye, that I should keep a journal. Well! here is the journal that I have kept. Whether you will ever see it I don't know. Whether I have written it for myself or for you I don't know. But I do know that all I saw and heard upon my journey was referred to you in my mind.

I arrived at the Summer Palace before the heat of the day, but the Guru was not yet there, for he had been too weak and tired to make an early start. When I saw him come up the steps I was frightened, so ill did he look. It was necessary that he should rest, so we did not set out till late in the afternoon, and we had got no farther than the Agra high-road when evening fell.

We camped in a withered grove by the roadside. I ordered the palanquin-bearers to put up a palm-leaf shelter, and behind this the Guru sat in a kind of daze, his eyes fixed on the red sun as it sank. A hot wind beat on the shelter, filling the grove with the rustle of dry leaves.

While our men were preparing for the night I looked out on all sides over the plain. The ground, which at this time of year should have been green, was brown and barren, and swept by clouds of dust. It was the hour of melancholy. The Guru's condition troubled me, and I thought of Hawa Ghar with longing and regret.

Presently I discovered that I had made a bad choice of our first camping-ground. The grove was squalid and evil-smelling, being full of the litter that other travellers had left behind. Dusk fell upon us before our supper was ready, and then, owing to the carelessness of the cook, a fire sprang up in the fallen leaves, and for a few minutes it looked as if the whole grove would be in flames. These were moments which I shall always remember, for the sunset, seen through the smoke, was ominous, and the burning leaves fell like fiery birds through the air. When our rice came neither the Guru nor I had any appetite, and soon after our meal we lay down for the night.

I fell asleep at once, but had uneasy dreams. Several times I

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started up, thinking that the Guru had called me. There was a continual passing of travellers upon the road; noisy companies chattered and shouted to each other; and the wheels of their ox-carts made a constant creaking.

After two or three hours sleepiness departed suddenly from me; I sat up and looked about, my mind clear. The moon was now high, the wind had fallen, all travel along the road had ceased. So great was the change it seemed another place. Turning round I saw the Guru sitting upright and cross-legged like a yogi; his eyes fixed upon the distance, he was lost in meditation.

I sank back and lay still; and my thoughts turned to you. I thought of our last talk by the pool of Vishnu — and, although only one day had passed by, how long ago it seemed! I remembered how we walked across the lawn, and took the little path through the wood, and how the moonlight, broken by the boughs, fell upon our faces with a flickering touch. I remembered how the small owls, sitting overhead in silent companies, remained undisturbed as we went by. We passed through the gate and stopped before the pool, which was more than half in shade. Light fell upon one shining corner of it, but Vishnu's face and all the water about his sleeping form were dark; and a small, coiled serpent slid off his face and made a ripple as it swam away.

Oh, Damayanti, do you remember those things as I do? Do you remember how impassively the god looked up? And all the inhuman world about him, the world of trees and snakes, seemed to be darkly interpreted by his divinity.

Standing there and thinking of the future, I was sad. And again, as I lay in this withered grove and thought of the past, the same sadness returned to me. But I succeeded in conquering it. I said to myself: 'Have I not found what my spirit needs — the country, the air, and the water that it has always longed for?' I began to think about the inner spirit as a fish swimming in the deep of the sea; sometimes it is in a water that suits it, not too cold, not too salt, but flowing smoothly and pleasantly about its sides and into its moving gills; and sometimes it finds itself in a muddy and ill-flavoured water, and sometimes in a water that is too deep and dark, a water of intolerable heaviness. I reflected that my spirit had never been at ease until it came to Hawa Ghar; but there it had found an ethereal fluid through which it swam in ecstasy; it was a fish gliding over sun-lit groves of coral and fields of whitest sand.

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But who except a true yogi can control the inner man? I could not abide in thankfulness and was soon carried away into a desert full of evil phantoms. I reflected that perhaps it was fated that I should never return to Hawa Ghar, or see you and Mohan again. I dreaded this visit to Agra, and still more my eventual return home. I could not keep still upon my couch. Sickly smells rose from the ground; the night was stagnant; even a dry, hot wind would have been better. Then I saw that the sky itself was uneasy, being streaked by shooting stars. And, presently, as I stared upwards, there came a veritable portent. A greenish-yellow globe appeared in the high north, hung motionless there for an ominous moment, and then slid in the direction of Agra.

I had raised myself on one elbow to look at it, and now I turned my head. Against the screen of dry palm-leaves, which shone silver in the moonlight, the Guru, still sitting cross-legged and erect, was like the figure of a god carved in some dark wood.

He said: 'If Akbar saw that meteor he will take it as a sign from heaven, and ask me to read its significance.'

His voice was low and husky; he began to cough; and the movement of his shoulders changed him from a god into a frail old man. I got up and gave him some water from a porous jar. After we had both drunk, I sat down. 'My child', he said, 'I have been thinking about your uncle Hari. As you know, he has gone to Agra to see Akbar; but it is not about that that I am troubled, although, to be sure, their talk may turn out badly; — I am troubled about Hari himself.' Then he laid a hand upon my knee, and added: 'Hari is not the man to make happiness for himself or for others. This evening the image of him has haunted me, and brought with it fears for your mother.'

From this I understood that Hari had confided in the Guru; nor was I surprised. I said: 'I, too, have been thinking about my mother.'

'What have you been thinking?'

'That I am going to find it difficult not to disappoint her, or displease her; and yet . . .'

'And yet?'

I was silent. Then I said: 'She is a European and a Christian.'

The Guru smiled. 'Don't you think you can explain to her that the life you want to lead is none other than the Christian life?' And as I made no answer to this he went on: 'Some years ago

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Father Aquaviva gave me the New Testament, and I read it. I was amazed, for it showed me that the way of life I was trying to follow was the Christian way. When your mother sees you trying to follow it too, won't she be glad?"

Looking into my face, he saw me doubtful, and went on: 'You are thinking that it is particularly difficult to explain oneself to one's parents. But are you sure that your mother will not be willing to let you talk to her as one human being to another? Have you ever tried to tell her the things you are willing to tell me?"

I shook my head.

The Guru laughed. 'Well, try! Forget that she is a European and a Christian — and your mother. One should never assume that people won't understand.'

He took another draught of water, looked up into the sky, and went on: 'When I stand before Akbar I am going to try to forget that he is a foreigner and a ruffian and an Emperor. I shall speak to him, if he will let me, as one man to another. It is my only chance of success.'

There followed a long silence during which I considered his words and what chance I had of making myself understood not only by my mother and Gokal, but — as would be necessary — by our chief ministers and officials at home. I did not feel very confident.

The next two mornings we started quite early, and at sunset on the second day the citadel of Agra rose dimly up out of the plain. A few miles to the east the domes and towers of Fatehpur-Sikri glittered in the evening light. That night we slept badly, for the wind changed and brought into our camp the sweet, sickly smell of putrefaction, and in the morning we learnt that it came from an arena on the Agra road, in which there had recently been terrible butchery. Several hundred men and women, found guilty of belonging to one or another of the Secret Sects, had been herded in the enclosure habitually used for elephant-fights, and there trampled to death. Rather than pass that way the Guru decided that we should take the slightly longer road through Fatehpur-Sikri.

We reached the Western Gate at noon. It was very hot, I could hardly recognize the main street, as we walked up it, so dusty, shabby, and forlorn was its aspect. We found an inn and took a room in which to pass the heat of the day. But after the Guru had lain down I went out and made my way towards the palace pre-

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cincts. In all the bazaar there was no sound but the buzzing flies, and nothing to be seen but a few idlers and many lean dogs. Arriving at the flight of steps before the Mosque, I sat on a stone in the meagre shade of a tamarind and wondered if you, Damayanti, remembered me at all. A heavy weight lay on my spirit. I felt an unhealthiness in the place, as if, like a human being, it had fallen sick. The great Mosque so new, yet derelict, rose up unnaturally out of the dust in which fowls were scratching. All round me was bare, untidy ground, with no living thing to be seen but those fowls and a goat.

At last I went up the steps and entered. The Mosque was empty, for not only was I the only man there, but Allah himself had departed. Yet a certain sternness remained in the air.

On leaving the Mosque, I wandered in the great, deserted courts, and it seemed but a few days since I had stood there with my father at the Durbar. But now all was changed — and so, indeed, was I!

I remembered how the streets had been thronged; I remembered the flags, the soldiers, and the royal elephants. In these courts Princes and Nobles had been crowded together almost as thickly as the people outside. Memories of my father enveloped me. I saw him in his princely dress, the white turban of State upon his head, and looking more kingly than the others because more grave and more remote. I saw the smile with which he looked down to encourage me; and then I imagined him as he must be now. Now he is plodding along in the dust among the simple and poor.

After a while I passed on, and, entering another court, I made an unwelcome encounter. A stout, swarthy man wearing an enormous red turban was sitting outside the Private Audience Chamber, fanning himself and sweating in the heat. His face awoke unpleasant recollections, but it was too late to retreat, for he had seen me.

‘Prince Jali!’ he cried. ‘Well, well, well!’ And with a friendly laugh held out his hands. ‘Who would have thought that our next meeting was to be here!’

I did my best to conceal my feelings, for I remembered this man — Churaman was his name — as one of the least unpleasant of Daniyal’s friends. More than once at the Pleasance of the Arts he had been kind to me.

‘Well, well!’ he went on, his eyes running over me as if I had been

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a dancing-girl. 'I am delighted to see you. But why are you so early? The party doesn't begin till after sunset. I'm here because Jagashri has asked me to make the arrangements. In the first place, I have to settle just where we shall have our supper. I suggested Akbar's bedroom' — here he gave a kind of giggle — 'but now I doubt whether it will be big enough to hold us all. Perhaps this Audience Chamber will do. Let's go in and see!'

With that he thrust his arm through mine and drew me along beside him. In all haste I explained that I was not one of Rancee Jagashri's guests; but Churaman, who was examining the Chamber and deciding that the musicians should be placed here, and the wines and food there, continued to chatter. 'My dear, it is going to be an exceedingly amusing party, and you must certainly come. Jagashri can't have known that you were in Agra or she would have invited you. Nearly all our friends from the Pleasance are going to be there, and — ' here he broke off, and I saw from a change in his face that he had suddenly remembered what had happened to my father at the Pleasance. For a moment he hesitated, then went on: 'But tell me all about yourself. What brings you here?'

Briefly I described how I had left my parents at the Sesodia Castle. Of my father's withdrawal from the world I said nothing.

'Yes, yes! I see. That's very interesting.' He continued to examine the Audience Chamber with a critical eye. 'Are you travelling alone?' And then, giving me a searching glance: 'Perhaps you have come to see what can be done for your uncle Hari Khan?'

I was determined to say nothing about the Guru. I felt the strongest possible disinclination to speak to Churaman about my affairs or those of my friends.

'I certainly want to see my uncle,' I replied. 'But I have other business as well in Agra.'

Churaman looked at me rather strangely for a moment. 'Poor Hari Khan, you know, has just been put in prison.'

I started at this and gave an exclamation of dismay.

Churaman patted me on the shoulder sympathetically. 'I'm sorry to be giving you bad news; but there it is! And Hari Khan is not the only one either! Do you know, Daniyal himself is as good as in prison! — at any rate he's not allowed to step outside his palace. It's a great shame he can't come to this party.' Here he paused again, the recollection of my father returning to him. 'You will find



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everything in Agra at sixes and sevens. Akbar is in one of his worst moods; he has really become quite impossible lately.'

For at least a minute we were both silent. I was divided between a strong desire to get away and the feeling that I ought to learn all I could. 'Why has Akbar put Hari in prison?' I asked.

'Heaven only knows! It's all part of his bad temper, which dates from the burning down of the Pleasance. About that you must surely have heard? A real calamity! Daniyal had collected together such a lot of beautiful things — many of them from Akbar's own palaces. In fact that is how all this trouble began. For after the fire various busy-bodies began to draw the old man's attention to the disappearance of those things. There has been a regular conspiracy to injure Daniyal's reputation in every possible way. He has even been accused of belonging to one of the Secret Sects; and that horrid little man, Mabun Das, was at the bottom of it all. However, now that he's dead we may hope that . . .'

'Dead!' I exclaimed.

'Yes. He died in the fire.'

'But . . .' I began, then stopped.

Churaman looked at me. 'I see that you are very much behind the times. Haven't you heard that Daniyal discovered that Mabun Das was a traitor in the pay of Salim? So what he did was to lure him up to the Pleasance and put him in prison there. It was in the gaol that Mabun was burned alive. His charred body was found afterwards in the cell.'

'How did Daniyal discover that Mabun Das was a traitor?'

'From that girl Gunevati. It is always a woman that does these things. She betrayed the whole plot. It was not enough to cut her tongue out, she deserved more — and in the end she got it.'

There was a note in Churaman's voice that made me shrink away. He gave me a sidelong glance and changed his tone. 'Anyhow, she is the person chiefly responsible for Hari Khan's being in prison at this moment. There can be little doubt about that.'

'What has happened to her?'

'She was trodden to death by the mad elephant; — but it was done by Akbar's orders — not Daniyal's. Daniyal himself hates cruelty of any kind.'

How I finally broke away from Churaman I can't remember. Hurrying back to the Guru I reported what I had heard, and we

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decided that on reaching Agra our first action would be to visit Hari, if Akbar's permission could be obtained.

I thought that I had seen the last of Churaman, but there I was mistaken. Just as the Guru and I were about to start, a large red turban appeared in the doorway and Churaman strode up to us. Someone had told him with whom I was travelling, and where we were to be found. He stayed and chatted for about an hour, and as I accompanied him to the street door his last words were these: 'Well, I'm so glad to have met the Guru. I had always imagined him as much too holy ever to see a joke. But this nice old creature has the sense not to pretend to be any holier than anyone else. Well, good-bye. I'm sorry you won't be at our party.'

Oh, Damayanti, I wonder if you understand why I have written all this down? I myself hardly know. I think I am writing to justify myself, to illustrate my hatred of the world! It seems to me so evil — so coarse in spirit, so heartless, so trivial, so vulgar. Yes! the world instinctively hates everything that has delicacy, fineness, or magnanimity. Our sky is an ugly, leaden sky, against which, every now and then, the spirit of a good man shines for a moment like a rainbow, a little flicker of beauty that cannot last.

WE reached Agra just after dark. The road was so thronged with soldiers and provision carts that it took us half an hour to get through the city gate, and in the bazaar people were still buying and selling by the light of lamps, lanterns, and torches. On foot the Guru and I picked our way through the jostling crowds, and had some little difficulty in not getting separated. The Guru seemed to know the town well; he led me down a maze of small back-streets to halt at last before a shop that was still showing lights, although all the rest of the alley was dark. It was a silk-merchant's shop, and the owner was sitting in his place at the back, a heavy, placid man whose face at first sight did not commend him to me, for he had fat cheeks and cunning, sleepy eyes. When the Guru entered and addressed him as a friend I was surprised. Moreover, he did not rise at once, nor even show sign of pleasure, but with slow deliberation put away some little bits of woods that he was carving, and wiped his large, oily hands on a cloth. But a smile did creep over his face at last, and he led the way into his private quarters at the back of the shop. The house was bright and clean, completely free of the useless lumber that I expected to see there.

While I was in my room washing myself an unexpected sound came to my ears — the singing of birds. I recognized the note of the bul-bul, and then the voices of other birds, some of which were familiar, but not many. To hear such singing in the heart of the city was strange, and I began to think differently about the man who took pleasure in this bird-music. But I couldn't understand how it came about that all these birds were striking up so gaily at this hour. From the Guru, when I asked him about it, I got nothing but a smile. 'Come upstairs on to the roof,' he said. 'The birds are there, and, I hope, some supper as well.'

The roof was lit by large, yellow paper lanterns, but I saw no birds anywhere. The singing, too, stopped abruptly the moment we appeared. Our host's wife and his two daughters led us to a corner where a table was laid ready for a meal. Hardly had we settled ourselves upon our cushions when the rice came in; and never have I eaten better.

'Champa Lal,' said the Guru presently, 'Prince Jali is eager to see your birds. Where have you hidden them?'

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The merchant's fat face was overspread by a smile which made it look foolish, but which also showed me that he was a nicer man than I had thought. 'There are my birds!' he said, pointing to his women-folk who were waiting on us; whereupon, knowing what he wanted, they retired into the shadows on the other side of the roof, and, behold, the same bird-music as before went up into the night!

Then Champa Lal showed me certain little instruments that he himself had invented and made, using wood and metal, waxen strings and hollow tubes, and even tiny vessels of water. And after supper he with his wife and daughters gave a concert in which all the singing-birds of the world seemed to be joining together.

Shortly before midnight the party broke up, but my day was not yet finished, for it had been decided that I should go to the Old Palace to arrange with the Chamberlain for an audience with the Emperor the next day. The plan was that the Guru and I should intercede jointly on behalf of Hari and seek permission to visit him in prison.

The Great Gate of the Old Palace is very dark, for the circle of torches round the arch is kept burning all night long when the Emperor is inside, and the flames have blacked the stone with smoke. There is always a draught here, making the flames and the smoke beat against the wall. At night the wall towers up immeasurably into the sky; and when one lifts one's head to look at the stars, they shine red through the smoke. At the time of the Durbar the torches were lit only on the night of the Emperor's birthday, for he was then holding Court at Fatehpur-Sikri. All that now seems very long ago.

As I stood at the Palace Gate memories rushed over me. I remembered a certain little wiry plant that was clinging to life on the northern wall, and I wondered if there were any means by which I could get on to the balcony and see if it was still there. The snake that struck at the little plant is dead. Narsing is dead, Gunevati is dead, my father has withdrawn from the world. My mother is lonely, Hari is in prison, Ambissa and Srilata are unchanged (or have they changed? I don't know). Many children have been born, and many old men have died. I have grown up — and that is Time! Time, about which no man can say anything.

The Palace Chamberlain was not easy to reach — it took me two hours — but when at last I did obtain access to him he was very

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accommodating. There are two kinds of persons in the Palace: those in whom the Guru's name arouses a faintly contemptuous impatience, and those whose faces light up when I mention him. The Chamberlain, although plainly a worldly man, was among the latter.

While waiting I sat in a large and lofty hall through which Court personages were continually passing, and I had nothing better to do than observe them. At first I was much impressed by the ceaseless movement and the air of important concentration that I saw everywhere. Some men carried papers, some went past in twos and threes talking earnestly in low voices, some walked by themselves thoughtfully. The last were mostly soldiers, and these fascinated me, for civilians seemed to be invisible to them. One, a Commander of Fifty-thousand, strolled up and down through the crowd for half an hour without apparently being aware that there was anyone else in the hall. After a while, however, I became convinced that not one of the people here was so weightily burdened but that a sense of his own importance kept his spirits up. A man riding along on a stately elephant in the shade of a howdah, however deeply concerned he may be with the miseries of the world, will think twice before exchanging his place with another, who, although possibly quite cheerful, is plodding along on foot in the heat and dust, jostled by every passer-by. All my companions in this hall were riding elephants, and I should have been much happier if I could have felt that I, too, was mounted on one. What I needed was that one of these grand riders should speak to me; and, to my great delight, this presently happened. Rajah Mahabal (whom I dislike, but that did not in the least matter) came up, and while we were talking together I had a fine elephant beneath me. A little later, too, some friends of my father's recognized me, and I was invited to walk up and down the hall with them.

This was intoxicating. In a moment I was doing all I could to produce the right impression. My aim was to appear shy without too much self-consciousness; modest, although self-possessed; naive without being awkward or silly; intelligent without being precocious. Questioned about my father, I was brief and direct, but showed by a suitable change in voice and expression that my feelings had been deeply stirred. It was assumed that my father had discussed his retirement with me and that I had given serious thought to the duties connected with my future position. I said nothing to correct these assumptions. Of my mother, too, I spoke with filial warmth

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and protectiveness, and for Gokal expressed a becoming respect, but was quick (when given the cue) to show that I was not blind to his foibles. After a while my companions began to talk about the Guru. They were not badly-intentioned men; but they treated him with an airy patronage. And how did I respond? Rather than forfeit any particle of their good opinion I contrived by cunning silences and an air of discomfort to seem too loyal to be willing to agree with them. Thus at every point I sacrificed those whom I really love and respect in order to gain a little esteem from those whom I do not.

O Damayanti! I feel ashamed of myself. Having met goodness and recognized it, why do I still cringe and pander? Why do I need to be puffed up by the breath of fools instead of standing erect in my own strength? And why, when men gather together, do they lay each one of their number under so strong a temptation to use all his secret meanness?

I will go back to my story. The Palace Chamberlain, who had been slow to receive me, was equally slow to let me go. This puzzled me at first, for the hour was late and my conversation far from entertaining; but all at once I understood. This man spent his whole life and took his whole pleasure in the leisurely display of charming manners; and it was a matter of indifference to him who happened to be seated opposite. I have said that his face lit up when I spoke of the Guru, but it also lit up, as I remember now, with a similar geniality when I mentioned the Sesodia. For him to have a name is all; the why is without interest. Leaning back in his chair, finger-tips resting against finger-tips, he produced anecdote after anecdote about my father and mother, Ambissa and Lakshmi, the Sesodia, and the rest. I left him flattered by his geniality and still feeling well pleased with myself. For what Peter did under the fear of death we do hourly under the fear of a shrug or a raised eyebrow, and are hardly aware of doing it.

The next morning the Guru and I set out for the Emperor's Camp, which is outside the city walls. It was there that Akbar was to be found, for he divides his time between the Old Palace and this camp. Camp surroundings suit him best, and he likes to think of himself as still an active soldier. It is part of his policy, too, to let his subjects see him moving freely among them, visible, accessible, a man like any other.

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As we pushed our way through the crowds the greatness of the city, and the multitude of its people, and the complicated activity everywhere moved me to an excitement that was sometimes pleasant and sometimes akin to fear. Outside the walls and round about the Camp the throng of people was almost as great as in the city itself. In one place a large body of horsemen was holding a military display, and the spectacle was indeed a splendid one.

When we reached Akbar's tent the Guru went in alone, for the Palace Chamberlain had not considered it proper that we should go together. I need not explain his various reasons, but prominent among them was the fact that I had not brought with me — in fact, I did not yet possess — suitable clothes. So I sat outside in the sun, and was quite content to do so. But my peace of mind did not last long, for it was then that I began to think about the evening before and become ashamed of my baseness. It is very painful when one sees oneself as a person for whom one has contempt and dislike. I sat in a glow of discomfort, sweating profusely. I forgot where I was, only coming to myself at intervals to pray that the Guru would not come back yet, for I should have been unable to conceal my condition. Fortunately, he was away a long time, and when he did appear he was absent-minded. He had had to wait for over an hour before obtaining his audience which had been a brief and disappointing one. It was true, he had obtained the assurance that he and I should be admitted to Hari the next day, but Akbar had displayed a temper that was unpromising. With a sigh the Guru said: 'I see that I shall have to be patient, for Akbar is now giving his mind wholly to the business of playing the Emperor.' And with a smile he went on: 'But, after all, this is excusable, for Salim's army is only thirty miles from the City gates, and there exists what everybody is agreed to call a critical situation.'

At this moment a tremendous roar went up from the crowd through which we were making our homeward way. A golden flag had just been run up from the highest tower of the Old Palace, and the men round us said that this meant that a victory had been won. But another man remarked later that this flag had been run up once a day for the last fortnight, and yet Salim was still pressing forward.

When at last we reached our lodgings we were very glad to be out of the noise and heat. The Guru sat quiet in meditation for a while, then he said: 'You see how it is: in every caste, in every rank and

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station, the same fever burns. The light of it shone from Akbar's eyes this morning; and, as I looked at him, despondency attacked me. I was seized with a great longing to say: "Akbar, I beseech you, look into your heart and tell me if you cannot find in all this agitation around you — in these cheering crowds, and galloping horsemen, in this martial music, these solemn conclaves, these ceremonious banquets, and these high-sounding speeches — an element of childish make-believe? Akbar, if I call this scene unreal, it is because you could, if you would, dissolve it into empty air; you could show it to be one of the thinnest veils of Maya. It is open to you to summon Salim to your side, and talk to him, not as an Emperor to a rebellious subject, nor yet as an angry father to a disobedient son, but as one honest human being to another. You know Salim's character well; and you know that with a few small concessions you could make him your friend."'

'But could he?' I exclaimed, surprised. 'Is it as simple as that? And if so, why has this great problem of the succession been vexing us all these years?'

The Guru looked at me with amusement in his eyes. 'I don't know how to talk about politics — or religion. I can only talk to people about themselves, and' — here he laughed — 'that is all they ever seem to want to talk to me about.'

'Yet you are making yourself the reputation of being a very dangerous kind of person.'

'That must be because, after a man has talked about himself, he generally begins to consider what he should do with himself. And the things a man does have mostly a social significance. Nevertheless every action is personal at its roots. If Akbar talks to me about the succession I shall be obliged to treat this great, public question as a small, personal question, and that, indeed, it is.'

I asked the Guru to explain.

'Well! Akbar has known, ever since he established himself as Emperor, that the Princes and nobles of India regard him as a barbarian. He is sensitive to their opinion, and shrinks from doing anything that would give them an opportunity to say slighting things about him. Now Daniyal is more presentable and sophisticated than Salim, and the nobles are persuaded that they will be safer in his hands than in those of his boorish and headstrong brother. I do not believe, as some people do, that Daniyal has really been able to deceive his father in regard to his character; but it has suited



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Akbar to play Daniyal against Salim in order to retain power over both. It is like this that the great question of the succession has been built up. But what importance has it for the people at large? None at all, if they could only see it! Very few, indeed, of the great political conflicts that make up so much of "history" truly touch the welfare of the multitude who are dragged into the fray. The people are always easy to deceive. They are like a sick man tossing in a fever, who, not understanding what is the matter, will eagerly accept any remedy.

'If I were to say this to Akbar he would probably be unwilling to take my meaning, but he would certainly be quite capable of doing so. He would see, as I see, that there is something profoundly ungenerous in taking advantage of the want, the ignorance, and the hopefulness of the multitude to make them help him in staging a gigantic sham.'

'But what ought he to do then? What would you advise him to do?'

'I would say: "Akbar, look into your heart and acknowledge what you find there. You will find there weariness — and self-disgust. You are weary of your burdens and would gladly hand them over to your first-born, with whom you have a true affinity. You know that Salim is foolish and headstrong, but you also know that he has a good heart — and that you love him. You know, too, that the millions of India will be no worse off under him than under you. Actually, this important and dangerous political situation, in which the happiness and the lives of millions are at stake, reduces itself to something quite small and homely. An old, old story is re-enacting itself; and nothing in it is fine, except the courage, the loyalty, and the faith of the hundreds and thousands whom you are deceiving."'

I felt that the Guru was right, but, after thinking for a moment, I objected: 'Well, but is there nothing to be said for power, and valour, and glory? Isn't it good that kings should be kings, and heroes heroes, and the world a place where noble tragedies are enacted?'

The Guru smiled and shook his head. 'Human beings are so made that they will never give a *lasting* admiration to anything which contains the element of make-believe. Kings and statesmen, indeed whole nations, may concert together to stage scenes of spectacular greatness, but later generations will look back with a smile, and of

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all that bravery of word and deed nothing — either in the individual or in the mass — will command admiration that does not ring true.’

I was silent for a while, then I said: ‘I wish that you could speak like that to Akbar. But you can’t. It would be asking too much of him.’

‘No, I can’t say these things. But I can — perhaps — bring them into his mind. For he already knows them. He feels his life to be drawing to a close, and when the end is near a man makes a return to his first intuitions — which in Akbar were intuitions of plain truth. He was born in Islam and believes by instinct that all men are equal in the sight of the one and only God. There is no hierarchy in Islam, no priestly caste, no esoteric knowledge — nothing to stand between man and man and God.’

‘You will appeal to his sense of justice.’

‘I will — to an uncorrupted sense of justice. Akbar sees that there are two kinds of inequality among men — one natural, and one artificial; and he is willing to allow that man-made inequalities are unjust. He certainly thinks of himself as greater than any other living man (and it may be he is right), but he looks upon his greatness as inherent in himself, not conferred upon him from outside. Human conventions and institutions he values at no more than their true worth. In this lies my hope.’

EARLY next morning we set out to visit Hari, who is imprisoned in one of the dungeons hollowed out of the citadel's rock. The door to this ancient prison is small and plain, but no less grim for that. A chill descended upon me as I looked at it.

The Chief Warder, a fat, smiling, old man, received us with a stream of friendly chatter, but I should have been happier if he had not spoken of torture and execution as if they were the most familiar and necessary things in the world. I don't think his prisoners can take much pleasure in his conversation.

Just as he was about to conduct us down a cold, dark passage he gave another glance at the order he had received from Akbar and at once called a halt. 'Dear me! dear me! What's this? I see nothing here about admitting Prince Jali. This order refers only to you, Guru.' Akbar's scribe had carelessly omitted my name; and as the Warder could not go beyond his order, I was obliged to remain behind.

Preferring not to wait in the Warder's gloomy room, I went out and sat on a low wall in the sun. Crowning the great rock that towered above me were the battlements of the Old Palace, and it came into my mind that somewhere round the corner was the little balcony from which I had once — not so very long ago — looked out over the plain. I remembered what I had felt as I stood there, and suddenly the vague fear that had haunted me returned again. I felt that I was living in a world that was ruled not by reason and affection but by a kind of arbitrary insanity. The busy, excited crowds, the pageantry of the camp, the self-important officialdom of the Palace, and now this conventionally grim prison — none of these things seemed to bear any true or necessary relation to men as by nature they are. I didn't see how the Guru could hope to influence by human appeal something inhuman — a vast and complex piece of machinery in which human beings had ceased to be human beings.

I was still sunk in these thoughts when the Guru reappeared, and as we walked away he told me what had befallen Hari. It appears that Hari's first meeting with Akbar took place five days ago, and that their talk, which began very stormily, ended well. The next

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interview went even better, and Hari was left with the impression that he had completely vindicated himself. But twenty-four hours later he was arrested, and since then has been kept in complete seclusion without any idea why Akbar has changed his attitude towards him.

We went down to the river, and seated ourselves in a patch of shade. Some women washing clothes were the only human beings in sight. One of them was singing:

‘Every woman is a spider,  
Her body is her web,  
She spins it on a fig-tree . . .’

and the Guru listened with a faint smile. There was a look on his face which kept me silent for a minute, but at last I asked him whether he had found Hari very dejected.

He shook his head. ‘No. At least not while he was talking to me. Besides, I doubt whether dejection has yet had time to settle down upon him. The excitement of what has happened is still bearing him up.’ Then, his eyes resting on me thoughtfully, he went on, ‘Hari, as much as any man I know, draws courage from his inner looking-glass. In every situation there is a picture of himself that he wants to present, and enjoys presenting. His miserable cell made a fine setting for flippancy and nonchalance. I haven’t succeeded in getting very much out of him.’

‘But this is dreadful!’ I cried. ‘For surely he must be in some danger? Doesn’t he realize that you might be able to help him?’

‘Yes. And I think that to-morrow we shall do better. His first impulse is always to produce an effect. He can’t bear not to make something of an occasion just as an occasion. This has been the trouble in his talks with Akbar. When he and Akbar are face to face he forgets that he is there to save himself from exile or worse, he forgets everything, except his desire to pass things off with style. He wants to impress Akbar, and if he can’t impress him in one way he tries another; if he can’t charm him, he proceeds to enrage him.’ And the Guru, looking at me ruefully, gave a little laugh. ‘He appears to have acted on my suggestion that he should be just as candid with Akbar as is possible — all things considered; but he has also been unable to resist the temptation to make great play with his candour. I am afraid he has taken pleasure in seeing just how far he could go, and put Akbar under considerable provocation.’

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I was silent. To tell the truth I was thinking as much about myself as about Hari. I couldn't put out of my mind my own behaviour of the night before. I said: 'It is as if there were something in the air of Agra that turns people into play-actors. The crowd behaves like a stage-crowd, the officials like stage-officials, the Emperor like a stage-Emperor. And Hari won't give up posturing even when in danger of his life. How far away and how small the little world of Hawa Ghar seems now! This is the great world, which sweeps along intoxicated by its own posturings. It can't change; and I don't see how you can hope to have any influence here.'

The Guru looked at me, then gave a little smile. 'Haven't you got something more on your mind?'

Then I told him how I myself had postured.

He laughed. 'Well, that only shows that you are not very different from other people. You took those friends of your father's for worldlings; but how do you know that you don't often present to the world the appearance of a hard, self-seeking, little worldling yourself? Those friends of your father's may have gone away with that impression of you lying dormant at the back of their minds. If you were pretending, so, most-probably, were they.'

These words awakened a memory, and after a silence I said: 'I remember a night in Agra when a great fear of the world was upon me, and it so happened that Hari was there, and that he guessed what I was feeling. I have never forgotten that talk. He said: "If one dreams that one is being chased by a pack of wolves, the thing to do is to turn oneself into a wolf; and then all is well. In the same way, if people frighten you, turn yourself into one of them. Pretend to yourself that you are like others, and they will cease to be so alarming".'

The Guru shook his head. 'Hari's advice was not good. Instead of turning oneself into a wolf, and so adding to the great welter of false appearances, one should have the courage to believe that others are at heart not very different from oneself. By nature and instinct persons are friends. If a stranger slights you, let the smart be brief. Let it be as though you had called at a friend's house and found that he was out. The next time you call he may be there.'

'Is it strange,' he went on, 'that there is so little trust and understanding in the world when each man terrified by the wolf-masks of others, snatches up a similar mask for himself? The tragedy of Hari's life is that he himself has always done as he advised you to do. By

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nature he is sensitive and diffident, and easily impressed by appearances; so in order to cope with the world he began early in life to dress himself up. He has acted his assumed character with a good deal of success; but at a cost that no one can afford.'

A look of sadness had come over the Guru's face, but after a little while he gave a laugh, and stretched himself, and called to a seller of water-melons who was talking to the women by the river. After buying a melon we cut it into slices with my dagger; and very refreshing it was.

'Here is a thing that never ceases to astonish me,' the Guru went on. 'There is an open secret in the world — something that everyone realizes at one time or another, and then hastily puts away, so that this piece of knowledge is as good as dead. It is this: the most powerful of appetites is the craving for consideration; and the most powerful of fears is the fear of losing consideration. There was a time in my life when I was enslaved by this appetite and this fear. That was when I was at the height of my reputation as a Holy Man. O Ram! Ram! what a sham my life then was! And can I be sure that I am not something of a humbug still?'

For a few moments he was silent, frowning to himself, then: 'Those memories,' he continued, 'ought to be useful to me in my talk with Akbar. I know how one feels when one is — even in a small degree — famous. It is of course very demoralizing. A man has to consider far too much the appearance he is presenting to the world; and the inner life is necessarily starved. Akbar's inner life is starved; but it is not dead. Were it dead he would be both more serene and more robust in health. For the man who succeeds in suffocating his inner life is not only relieved of inward conflict, but he can also devote to his external life the energy that would have gone to the other. Most often a man gains in equilibrium as he advances in years simply because he identifies himself more and more with the figure which he is presenting to the world. What is different in the case of a public hero is simply that the figure chosen is such a preposterous one. But, even so, with a little imagination one can — fairly easily — conceive oneself playing the part.'

I laughed and shook my head.

'Oh Yes! Think of yourself waking up one morning with nothing to do and free to indulge a mood of sensuous idleness. You yawn and stretch and dawdle; you hesitate for half an hour before plunging into the cold water of the swimming-pool; the tune played by a

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wandering musician at the gate brings tears of sensibility to your eyes. All day you go from one self-indulgence to another; you are receptive, contemplative; you dream. — Now take another morning when you wake up with the knowledge that you have a hard day's work before you. You summon energy, you brace your will, you leap from your bed. The shock of the cold water in the pool is not even felt; the music means nothing to you, nor the sight of the beggars at your gate. You are feeling strong, stern, determined. Then, imagine that for years you have accustomed yourself to this, built up the legend that this is your nature, persuaded other men that you are not as they. Imagine the eyes of hundreds and thousands of hero-worshippers fixed on you perpetually, expecting self-confidence, certainty, untiring energy, achievement. After a time, my son, you would require almost superhuman moral courage and strength of character to be lazy, vacillating, or even faintly self-doubting. — But Akbar has got great strength of character: that is just my point. He follows his own natural bent: he drinks, he gives himself up to fits of religious mysticism, he forgets his audience not merely for hours but even for days at a time. On the whole, he lives the life determined by his fundamental character — not merely one imposed upon him by vanity ruling through the will.'

On hearing these words I realized that until now I had despaired of the Guru's having any success with Akbar; at this moment, however, a wave of hope swept over me. I thought of you, Damayanti, and of Mohan, and of Hawa Ghar; I thought how glorious it would be if we could return to you successful. There is a buoyancy of spirit in the Guru that communicates itself. From this moment I began to feel more confident about everything.

We got up and walked slowly back to the prison, for the Warder had promised to see whether he couldn't obtain authority for my admission. The Guru went in alone, and I waited outside as before. He was longer than I had expected, and when he reappeared he said: 'The order to admit you has not yet arrived. But Hari wanted to see me again, for a disturbing bit of news had just reached him.'

I looked at the Guru interrogatively, but he replied: 'I will tell you about it when we get home. It's not easy to speak in the street.'

This was true, for the alley down which we were passing was narrow and crowded; but I presently perceived that he had another reason for saying no more just then. A man was following us, and the density of the crowd enabled him to keep quite close.

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When we were comfortably seated on the roof of the silk-merchant's house, and free from eavesdroppers, the Guru began. 'Although Hari is not supposed to have any communication with the outside world, he had received a message from someone — he didn't tell me who — which makes him anxious about Princess Lalita. When I went in he was pacing up and down in great disquiet. He says she must be warned to leave Agra at once. Now I am not in a position to carry messages to the Princess without attracting attention. What Hari wants is that you should take the message.'

'But I don't know her.'

'That doesn't matter. Hari's plan is that you should visit him this evening, when he will tell you what to do.'

On this he paused, and I, too, remained silent. I could see that this business was not particularly agreeable to him. However, after a minute, he went on: 'Hari has told me enough to make me feel that his request can hardly be refused. Your aunts Ambissa and Srilata are giving a party to-night; it will seem natural that you should go to it; and Princess Lalita will also be there. All you will have to do is to slip the message into her ear.'

My feelings were mixed. I felt a little annoyed with Hari for thrusting this affair on to us at this moment; the prospect of seeing my aunts again was most unpleasant; and I dreaded the party. But I was glad to be able to do something for Hari.



DRESSED in my best clothes and much disliking what lay before me, I set out for the prison soon after dark. This time the Warder made no difficulty about admitting me; I was at once led down a cold, gloomy passage to Hari's cell.

A turnkey unlocked the door, and by the light of a small oil-lamp I saw Hari reclining upon a stone seat opposite. All round was darkness; the little flame made only Hari visible. I stood and stared, and felt a sinking of the heart.

Jumping up, Hari came forward, embraced me, and, after making me sit down on the seat, began to pace the cell. He was preoccupied, at first he seemed hardly to notice my presence; but as I studied his face my heart warmed towards him. 'Jali,' he said, 'your coming to Agra at this particular moment is a great blessing. I have things to say that I could say to no one else.' There was a look in his eyes that I had never seen there before. 'I am thinking of your father — and your mother.' He halted before me and sought for words, not knowing how to express himself. 'I suppose that now I shall never . . . I shall never have the opportunity . . .'

I could say nothing; I could only look at him and nod my head. After a minute he gave a sigh, turned, and with shoulders hunched and head thrust forward went to and fro again. But now he plied me with questions about the manner of my father's sudden departure. I had nothing to tell him, and soon we both fell silent. But, although we were both filled with a kind of wonder, my father's action hardly seemed to us strange — just as death itself is not strange, although a wonder.

Presently he came and sat by my side upon the stone seat. 'I have a letter to give you,' he said, 'but we will talk about that later.'

By the light of the lamp I studied him, and behind his frowning face could see a mind feverishly at work. At last he came out of his thoughts, gave me a smile, and said: 'This afternoon I had another interview with Akbar.'

I started. 'Another interview! Tell me quickly: how did things go?'

'It's hard to say.' He threw out his hand with a shrug. 'The old man received me in a small private room in the Palace, and sent everyone away, so that we were quite alone.'

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‘Did he explain why you had been imprisoned?’

‘Yes. After looking me in the eyes for about a minute without uttering a word, he suddenly barked out: “Hari Khan! you belong to the foul society of Vamacharis; you join in their obscene and impious rites; you know well that you deserve to die.” For a few moments I stared at him in blank astonishment, then I smiled, and he must have seen that my smile was unfeigned. However, still glaring at me ferociously, he went on: “And as if this were not enough you are also implicated in the burning down of the Pleasance of the Arts — that is to say, you are guilty of destroying my property; — and for that again you merit death.” I continued to smile; my mind had made a jump, and I fancied I knew where I stood. Daniyal must have decided that this was the moment to use the information that he had extorted from Gunevati. No doubt he had worked up a fine story. But I was not disturbed. I felt I could deal with the situation.’

Leaning back with folded arms, Hari gave me a grin. He was now enjoying himself. ‘I had already discovered,’ he went on, ‘that the policy of frankness — recommended to me, by the way, by the Guru — is a very rewarding one. When a man is suspected of really grave offences he can confess to lesser ones without much danger. In the matter of Lalita Daniyal had, I felt sure, made me out far more culpable than I really was. There was an excellent chance that, if I told the truth, I should not only be believed but forgiven. So I continued to meet Akbar’s gaze with composure, while I waited for the pronouncement of Lalita’s name. Soon enough it came. With an attempt at cunning, he said: “Part of the evidence against you comes from Princess Lalita.” Well, I am not going to report the whole conversation. Briefly, what I did was to give Akbar an absolutely true account of my relations with Lalita; and when I had finished he was not seriously angry, although he still maintained his most ferocious manner. One of the reasons he took my confession so well is that he no longer sets much store by Daniyal’s marrying Lalita. So far so good. But there was one point upon which he remained dissatisfied. I was quite unable to convince him that Lalita had not taken some part in the burning down of the Pleasance; and I came away certain that she ought to leave Agra at once.’

‘But,’ said I, ‘if she leaves Agra suddenly, won’t that be evidence of guilt? And won’t Akbar pursue her?’

Hari knit his brows. ‘Perhaps, but she can’t stay; it’s too dangerous.’

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Besides, her sudden departure will have the appearance of being a runaway match — and in point of fact it *will* be a runaway match, for she will be going off with young Ali Beg, the Prince of Waristan, who has been wanting to marry her for a long time.'

With this he got up. Our little oil lamp was smoking and burning very low; I snuffed it, and looked into his face as he stood over me. His expression was sardonic. 'You mustn't misunderstand me,' he muttered, 'all that part of my life is now lost in the past. Do you see?'

I nodded. 'Yes, I see.'

He turned and fell to pacing up and down again. 'All the same, it's strange how sometimes the past — even the most insignificant past — will wriggle up out of the dust, like a half-killed snake, to bite you. I have made some bitter enemies.'

'Who have you in mind?'

'All those who wanted to see Lalita marry Daniyal,' he hesitated, 'Lalita's two brothers, for instance.'

I nodded again.

'All those, too, who suspect that in the last few days I have damaged Daniyal's prospects more than any other man in India.' And he laughed. 'I have told Akbar things that no one else has dared to.'

He was leaning with his shoulder against the wall. I thought he was lost in thought, when suddenly he said: 'God knows I wish the Guru success in his mission, but I think he makes the mistake of believing that all men are of the same kind as himself.'

These words expressed my own deepest misgivings. 'What do you mean?' I asked.

'Nearly every man has certain ideas in his head about which he can't think sanely. On certain subjects it's impossible to reason with him.'

'And Akbar . . .?'

Hari gave a laugh. 'Akbar appears to be normal enough and yet . . . consider his persecution of the Secret Sects! When the Vamacharis are mentioned the veins in his temples swell, his hands tremble, his whole aspect is changed.'

Certain memories re-awoke in me, and after a minute I said: 'Did you persuade Akbar that Salim was not a Vamachari and that Daniyal was?'

Hari, who was now pacing up and down again, stopped abruptly, threw a glance at me, and then resumed his pacing. I felt a sudden

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fear — both *for* him and, in some measure, *of* him. But I also felt some admiration.

The silence continued, and then, after drawing a long breath, I said: 'Well! fortunately, what the Guru has to talk to Akbar about has nothing to do with sex. His subject, as you know . . .'

Hari interrupted with a laugh. 'My dear Jali, it has to do with money; and Akbar is just as mad about money as about sex. Those two madnesses often go together. Haven't you noticed that?'

It was getting late. I felt I ought to go, but the atmosphere had changed, and I didn't like to leave Hari in the chill that had descended upon us. I think he read my thoughts, for, altering his tone, he began to talk about Ambissa and her party with a good deal of humour; and soon we were both laughing.

At last I got up.

'Wait a minute!' he said, and again his tone changed. 'I haven't yet given you my letter.'

With these words he drew a letter out of the breast of his tunic and handed it to me. 'It's for your mother. I want you to give it to her in the event of my death. You understand? Keep it safe till then.'

I took the letter and hid it in my dress. 'I understand. I will do as you say. But . . .'

 And I hesitated.

'It's a relief to have had this talk,' he murmured.

'But,' I went on, 'something is troubling me. Is there any danger hanging over you that you have kept hidden?'

'No. None.' And he smiled.

There was a silence. I had a strong feeling that we were dealing with realities — not fancies, and that Hari had given me that letter with good reason. But somehow neither he nor I were able at that moment to feel any emotion. We were caught up in a current of life in which emotion had no place.

Nevertheless I found it hard to leave him without another word. As we were moving towards the door I stopped irresolutely.

He gave me a pat on the shoulder. 'Off you go — and don't let that letter worry you! I have my superstitious moments like everybody else. I daresay it is the death of Randhir that has affected me.'

I had forgotten that he had travelled up to Agra with Randhir. In fact I had forgotten all about Randhir. While I was trying to think of something to say he pushed me gently out of the cell. 'Good luck!' he cried and closed the door behind me.

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The turnkey was outside. He got up from the ground yawning, locked the door, and went before me down the passage.

I came out into the hot night with the cold of the prison in my bones, and a spirit chilled and shivering. I wanted to run back to Hari to add something, but I did not know what. It was blowing hard, and the air was full of dust. Pulling my cloak about me, I hurried away, head down against the wind. There were no stars. Martial music sounded in the distance and sometimes the wind carried it to me, and sometimes blew it away. In my mind there was a fumbling, as if things which I might have known were struggling to show themselves.

O Damayanti! was it only by chance that out of that confusion there emerged the shape of Randhir? The things that Hari and I had talked about fell away from me, and the ghost of Randhir was left alone to walk along at my side. Hari and Randhir, I remembered, had travelled up to Agra together. No doubt they talked only of external things, no doubt they joked together; but the atmosphere of death was already hanging about Randhir, and Hari certainly felt it. Why did they only joke together? Was it courage or cowardice? Why was Randhir taking himself and his men to a painful and useless death? Why was Hari acquiescent? Are they both weak — and both weak in the same way? And is that why his own death is now haunting Hari?

My thoughts went thus far, and could get no further. Nor would the ghost at my side help me, for the dead man seemed to have carried his smile of quiet hopelessness beyond the grave.

Presently I came to the door of the palace occupied by Ambissa. The major-domo had a list of the guests' names, and my name, naturally, was not there. But when I told him who I was he showed me into a small, empty room adjoining the vestibule, and went to inform his mistress that I was waiting.

Her face alight with curiosity, Ambissa soon hurried in. 'My dear! So it is you! I thought it must be some impostor — some spy from Salim's camp! I have had to give the strictest orders, because, although this is quite a small party, we have one or two very, very important people here.' She spoke those last words laughingly, but her self-satisfaction was evident. 'Jali!' she went on, drawing me to the light to examine me, 'it is years, positively years, since I last saw you! And now you have become a young man.' I saw a hundred thoughts darting through her head as she ran her eyes over me.

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'We really must have a talk. There is so much I want to hear. Couldn't you come in to-morrow afternoon?'

My face must have told her this did not suit me, for the next instant she came to another decision. 'No. Wait a moment!' And, after speaking a few hurried words to the major-domo, she returned with a completely different manner. 'Come and sit here!' She sank on to a divan with a leisurely sigh. 'Now we'll have a nice, quiet talk. I needn't think about my guests; they will be quite happy by themselves. Tell me how you left your mother. Poor darling Sita, how lonely she must be feeling! Of course she knew this was coming, but . . .' And she shook her head.

I felt little inclined to feed her curiosity, which hardly even pretended to have any true friendliness in it; but I told her the bare facts of our case. And she, poor woman, was obliged to be content with that. For, you see, she couldn't very well ask me about my father's injury (which had come to him from her friend Daniyal), or about my mother's relations with Hari, or indeed what brought me to her house at this moment. She mentioned the Pleasance of the Arts, and I could see that she had heard about my visits there, but this again was a topic she had to avoid. Here we were, however, professedly sitting down to 'a nice quiet talk!' Presently, when I spoke of my stay with Bhoj and Lakshmi, she caught at these names, just as I knew she would.

'Oh, tell me about dear Lakshmi! It's so long since I've seen her. I was to have paid her a visit last month, but at the last moment I couldn't manage it. How I envy you your long stay in that enchanting place! Didn't you get to love it? and her? and him, too? Dear Bhoj! so steady, so wise!'

From the room in which we were sitting another larger room was visible through a wide archway. In this room there now appeared two women, one of whom was my Aunt Srilata, the other only showed me her back. Ambissa got up quickly. 'There's Ranee Devi,' she said beneath her breath. 'Poor, darling Devi! — You know what a terrible loss she has just had? Her husband, Randhir? Too tragic, isn't it? And now she has come to stay with me for a few days. I have given her some rooms at the back where she can be quite quiet, quite alone. Wait a moment, my dear; I must go and see if there is anything she wants.'

Fat and scented, but exceedingly erect and purposeful in her movements, Ambissa sailed up to Ranee Devi, and, grasping her by

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the arm, gazed up into her face, which she would, I think, have kissed, had it been within her reach. But the Ranee did not incline towards her, and replied to Ambissa's low caressing murmurs in her usual loud, somewhat harsh voice. She was looking haggard, but this suited her, as did her robes of mourning. Ambissa in her purposeful advance had pushed Srilata into the background, but the latter remained ready to reassert herself, and this she soon did, for, whatever suggestion Ambissa might make for her guest's greater comfort, Srilata had always some little correction to put forward which made the original suggestion seem slightly inadequate or ill-judged.

Ranee Devi accepted these attentions with a careless indifference, but I am quite certain that she enjoyed receiving them. It was giving her satisfaction, too, to ignore her tragic position and talk in her usual, matter-of-fact way, without showing any signs of grief. I fancy that her manner to Ambissa was a little more snubbing than usual, but the latter never flinched. All three women were — in some strange way — enjoying themselves.

I watched them with wonder — and distaste. Also with a certain shame. But I think that the dead man had a greater sense of humour than I have.

After a while Ambissa bore Ranee Devi away, and Srilata joined me in the other room. Beneath the light, affectionate cordiality of her manner she hid, I fancied, a faint embarrassment. And before we had exchanged many words I understood why. She had for some time past been associating herself completely with the world of Daniyal, and therefore no longer has any real sympathy left for my parents or any of us. This became especially discernible in her allusions to my father's withdrawal from the world, for while intending to express both understanding of him and sympathy with my mother, she failed wholly to conceal what she really felt — and that would have been well expressed by a shrug.

But I was glad to have these few minutes alone with her, for I knew I could safely entrust her with Hari's message to Lalita. She accepted the charge; but it was significant that she did not ask me when, or where, or how I had got into touch with Hari; and, having consented, she showed a nervous alacrity to pass on to another subject.

After a reasonable interval, I felt I could quite properly slip away. So I took leave of Srilata, pushed my way through the incoming guests that now crowded the hall, and was once again in the dark, hot, windy street.

THAT night my hours of sleep were few and filled with uneasy dreams. I went into the Guru's room late the next morning and was surprised to find him still in bed. When I asked if he was ill, he said no, but confessed that his heart had troubled him in the night; and, although he made little of it, I was seized with anxiety, for he would never lie in bed unless he felt his strength to be running very low.

Then I noticed a letter lying open on the bed and recognized Mohan's handwriting. 'You may read it,' he said, and when I had done so I understood why he was looking not only tired but sad. O Damayanti! the news in Mohan's letter made my heart ache. Presently the Guru said. 'The state of affairs at Daulatpur forbids delay. I must press Akbar for an immediate audience, and it must be a long and private one, if I am to have any chance of success. But I wish that a little delay had been possible, for Akbar is in no humour to pay much attention to me just now.'

I went out at once to call upon the Chamberlain and obtain an audience for the Guru as soon as it could be arranged. But I stopped at the prison on my way, for I had promised Hari to report quickly upon my evening's mission. Great was my consternation on being told at the prison door that Hari was gone, having been led away by an armed escort early in the morning. 'To his execution?' I cried, but the man neither knew nor cared. I asked for the Head Warder, and was told he was away on a holiday.

For a moment I was quite overcome, but, gathering my wits together, I decided that the Chamberlain was as likely to give me help as anyone else. So I hurried off to the Palace. By good fortune I was admitted almost at once, and found the Chamberlain as genial as ever; but his geniality went with such a complete indifference concerning Hari's fate that I had some difficulty in not showing anger. Besides, he had no information to give me; but I persuaded him to send off two or three runners to make inquiry in different directions. In the meantime he chatted in his usual leisurely way, quite regardless of the fact that his waiting-room was filled up with impatient visitors. I learnt to my surprise that Prince Daniyal, far from being a prisoner in his summer palace, as Churaman had told



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me, had withdrawn there in a fit of temper, after addressing to his father a formal request that he might be allowed to retire permanently from public life. 'But,' the Chamberlain added with a sly smile, 'I don't think we need take the Prince quite at his word. This is only a move in the game, a move in the game!' And, rubbing his hands together, he chuckled appreciatively.

At this point all three messengers returned, and, as not one of them had discovered anything, my visit to the Chamberlain came to a flat and unsatisfactory conclusion.

I could now think of nothing better than to hurry home to ask the Guru what to do next. On the way my imagination pictured dreadful things. Conceive, then, my astonishment when, upon opening the door of the Guru's room, I found Hari there, marching up and down, as gay as a peacock, in a brand-new, glittering uniform. I suppose I ought to have felt great relief — and, indeed, I did, but I was also rather put out — especially when, on my reporting what the Under-Warder had said, Hari shouted with laughter 'The soldiers who carried me off were the officers of my new regiment. They had come to welcome me into the Emperor's own Body-guard.'

I had noticed at once on coming in that the Guru was more cheerful, and now he told me why. Hari had brought him word that Akbar would give him an audience in the afternoon. When I heard this I rejoiced, but was struck with dismay upon Hari's informing me that I also was to appear before the Emperor. 'The Guru and you and I are all to go together,' he said. 'And you will be formally presented to him. You have to take an oath of allegiance as the new Rajah of Vidyapur.' I looked at the Guru, and with a smiling nod he confirmed Hari's announcement. I protested that I had no Court dress. But Hari declared that he had mentioned the matter to Akbar, who had dismissed it as of no importance.

A few hours later, accordingly, we all three set out. It distressed me to see that the Guru, although eager for his audience, was still looking tired and ill. I was feeling nervous, too, on my own account; and this nervousness was by no means allayed when, at the very door of the Palace, a supercilious Court functionary declared in horror that it would be quite impossible for me to appear before the Emperor in my present clothes. I would willingly have turned tail, but Hari would not have it. And another objection came from the

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Chamberlain himself, who, after having been ruffled by Hari's domineering tone, put up an obstinate resistance to my further progress. Going over my garments one by one, he devoted much time and energy to explaining the peculiar unsuitability of each. Hari, however, firmly maintained that he had authority to introduce me into the Royal Presence in whatever costume he pleased. After passing the Chamberlain, I encountered no more than starts of surprise, long stares, and raised eyebrows; but these, I assure you, were quite enough to keep my courage and self-respect very low.

The great terrace when we came out upon it was bathed in afternoon sunshine. At the farther end was a dais shaded and adorned by a canopy under which Akbar sat. We had a long approach to make, and at two places on the way carpets had been spread, indicating that at these points we were expected to stop and prostrate ourselves. My presentation and the taking of the oath of loyalty did not occupy us long, but, after those ceremonies were over, the formal atmosphere remained, and Akbar continued to play the Emperor with unabated majesty. He was sitting cross-legged on a cushion of gold cloth. He wore a tunic of silk, patterned with flowers, and bright with gold and silver thread. His trousers were of white sarsanet caught up at the ankle with strings of pearls. A small turban fitted tight to his head in a mode halfway between the Moslem and the Hindoo. It was decorated with rubies and diamonds. Sitting cross-legged he appears bigger than he really is, for his body is long as well as thick. I thought he looked older than his years, but although his face is puffy, his eyes are sparkling with life; one feels that for as long as he remains alive he will be vital.

Pushed to one side there was a low table covered with papers. He had dismissed his secretaries so summarily on our approach that nothing had been tidied away. And this proved to be a source of unending discomfort to me, for the strong breeze that was blowing lifted one paper after another from the table, and I had to run after each in turn and bring it back. During our audience I stood behind the Guru, who at Akbar's invitation was seated, while Hari, as an officer of the Bodyguard, had taken up his position at the Emperor's back. There was no one else upon the dais, nor indeed within ear-shot. The conversation, however, was quite uninteresting, for Akbar was discoursing in his public and official style. He delivered himself of a lot of heavy and empty aphorisms on the art of government, the duty of loyalty, and the wickedness of eating meat. As for

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me, I was in a state of disquiet the whole time, for, if it was disrespectful not to lend an attentive ear, it would surely have been even more disrespectful to let his papers blow right away without stirring a finger to retrieve them.

I was thankful when this state of affairs came to a close. There was a silence at the end of which Akbar looked over his shoulder at Hari and bade him step forward. He surveyed him for a few moments with an ironic eye, then said: 'You have been remarkably quick, Hari Khan, in dressing up in the uniform of loyalty, it remains to be seen whether the inner man wears garments to match.'

If Hari felt disconcerted (as well he might, for Akbar had suddenly become very formidable) he did not show it; he made a firm and quiet answer. Akbar, however, continued to eye him menacingly, and he went on: 'You have had the temerity to raise certain charges against one of my sons. The man who brings accusations against a Prince of the Royal Blood is offering his life as guarantee of the truth of his words. Is that not so?'

'That is so, Your Majesty.'

'Very well. — Prince Jali, give me the paper that was in your hands a moment ago.'

I started, then came forward and held out to him the last document that had fluttered away. He did not take it, but said: 'I think that is a letter addressed by me to my son Prince Daniyal, is it not?' And, when I had glanced at it and said yes, he commanded: 'Then give it to Hari Khan.' And to Hari he said: 'What is in the letter? Read!'

Hari began to read the letter aloud. It was a summons to Daniyal to appear before his father at the fourth hour after noon the next day. When he had finished, Akbar said: 'You, Hari Khan, will make your appearance here at the same hour. Accuser and accused shall meet in my presence.'

A shudder went down my spine, but I must say that Hari stood up to this very well. He inclined himself gravely and with dignity.

Then Akbar said: 'This audience is terminated. Take that letter, Hari Khan, and deliver it to my chief messenger, who is at the gate.'

With that Hari and I were dismissed, but not the Guru. To him he said: 'I have set aside this time for listening to you. Sit down again and speak.'

When once I had passed through the archway and was out of

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sight, I breathed a sigh of relief. In the passage there was a group of soldiers and Court functionaries, who glanced at us with a certain curiosity. One of them gave Hari a grin and said: 'Well?'

Hari replied with a lift of his shoulders.

A little farther on we came to a small court with seats round it. I touched Hari on the arm and suggested that we should wait here for the Guru.

He made no answer, but walked on, and I saw that he had fallen into so deep an abstraction that he had failed to hear me. I repeated my words, and still he walked on. At that I let him go; but it was not without a certain anxiety that I followed him with my eyes as he disappeared down the passage.

In the little court it was quite still. The humming of bees on the jasmine-covered walls was the only sound to be heard. I sat down. This silence would have been peaceful had I not been anxious. I was waiting for the Guru with impatience.

After about twenty minutes I began to wonder whether he might not have left the terrace by some other way; so I went back and questioned one of the soldiers. 'No. He is still there,' the man answered. 'You can look for yourself.' And he took me to a hanging screen of *kaskas* grass, from behind which one could see the whole terrace. And I saw the Guru sitting just where I had left him. Akbar, too, was in the same place, but now he was listening instead of talking. It was a small, bright, clear scene which I shall never forget—very beautiful in colour, and, as it seemed to me, in significance. For under that canopy of crimson and gold the small, white, slender figure of the Guru held the eye by the attraction of its bare simplicity. Although his voice was too low to be heard, the movement of his lips and his raised hand told me that he was speaking; but presently Akbar leant forward, brows knit and lips protruded in what seemed to be a scowl of dissent.

It was with a beating heart that I went back to my seat in the quiet, little court. What I had seen discouraged me, but the minutes, as they went on accumulating, revived my weakened hopes. I argued that, had the Guru's cause been lost, he would have been dismissed long ago, for Akbar is an impatient man. He makes his refusals with curtness, while his assents are cautious and slow.

After the passing of another hour my curiosity again got the better of me, and I persuaded the good-natured guards to let me take another peep through the hanging screen. What I saw was so strange

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that I started back to say to the man beside me, 'Look! Look!' and then put my eye to the hole again. The Guru was kneeling on the ground quite close to Akbar, and Akbar was leaning towards him, one arm round his shoulder, in an attitude that almost suggested an embrace. The Emperor's ear was placed against the Guru's chest; he was listening to his heart! I had refused, at first sight, to believe that this was so; and I cannot tell you, Damayanti, what a pang of fear now shot through me. Shaking with apprehension, I went back to the little court, and there tried to imagine what had been happening. Had the Guru had a heart attack? Was he dangerously ill? Was he about to die? His death, I felt, would leave me bereft, guideless, naked — to live a life that would be too difficult without him. But at last, after an interval of I know not how long, I heard his step in the passage. He appeared, and at the sight of him courage and hope returned. I ran forward. He drew me back into the little court, we sat down together; and the smile that he wore as he gazed about him told me that all was well. Yes, there was a look of deep serenity upon his face. But some of my fears lingered and I began to ask questions.

He laughed. 'My heart is weak, but I have known that for many years. I am not going to die for some time yet.'

'And you have been successful?'

'Successful!' He laughed again, very gently. 'What I wanted has come to pass. But, as you shall hear, I have not much to be proud of.' He looked up into the sky with a vague, wandering smile, in which I think I saw a little amusement — at himself, and a great gratitude — to the heavenly powers.

The sun was setting as we walked home. The Guru hung on my arm, for he was certainly very weak, and as dreamy as a man in an opium-haze. But after he had slept and eaten supper (which was served to us as usual on the roof), his strength returned, and the happiness that was in him flowed forth upon us all. Our host with his wife and daughters felt it no less than I. And presently to celebrate this happiness (although the cause of it was unknown to them), they retired to the unlit corner of the roof, and from there, as once before, a soft twittering arose, an almost imperceptible warbling, as when at the first blush of dawn very young birds raise their heads, and look about and try their voices, uncertain what sound will come. Then, just as with the rising sun such music spreads from one sleepy nest to another, so the uncertain notes joined in a louder harmony,

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until, through closed eyelids, one saw a wide, sunny landscape filled with the rejoicing sound.

The concert over, the others retired, leaving the Guru and me alone. He looked at me for a space with the same smile, and shook his head a little, and said again 'I have come back with a great prize — that is true; but, my son, without any excuse for self-conceit. Feeling that Akbar's humour was unfavourable, I gathered myself together like a wrestler who is confronted with a formidable opponent. I did what I took to be my best, but it was not my best. True feeling was absent, and I tried to replace it by cleverness. I remembered all that I had prepared. I waxed eloquent, and by and by a hopeful complacency spread over me. Not until I had finished did misgivings arise; and these misgivings turned into dismay when, after a long silence, Akbar gave a short, ironic laugh. "Guru," he said, "you talk and act after your kind, I talk and act after mine. Do you suppose that I should stand where I stand to-day if I had been as you are? And do you think that I am going to change now?" These were not his exact words, but I have expressed the substance of his hard and contemptuous speech. He was studying me through the narrow slits of his eyes, and suddenly, as I sat there with bowed head, he called out in another voice, a voice somewhat impatient, but less harsh: "My friend, you are tired. Go home and rest! You are an old man, and your body has never been strong like mine. Also you are ill. Lift up your head! — Yes, I can see that you are ill." I made a feeble denial, and he waved it aside. He was now leaning forward and examining me with a new interest. "It is your heart," he said. "I can read a man's body just as I can read his mind. I have the gift. Come here and let me listen to your heart!" He was rubbing his hands together in great satisfaction, and reluctantly I obeyed. Whereupon, seizing me with a good-tempered roughness, he thrust his head down over my heart, and held it there for a minute or more. Then he drew back, looked at me, and laughed. "Well?"

'I had to confess, "Your Majesty is right."

'He continued to study me, and his smile, although self-satisfied, was kindly. Then next, after I had gone back to my seat, he lifted a forefinger and proceeded to instruct me how I should look after myself. But while his loud, resonant voice was ringing in my ears I almost forgot where I was; I had withdrawn into my own dejection. For now I saw not only that I had failed, but I understood

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why. I had been bringing words forth out of my brain like a conjuror; and words that come out of the brain alone cannot reach the heart. That was why Akbar had been moved to resist me; but now that he saw nothing more than a tired and disheartened old man hanging his head before him, he was allowing his nature freer rein. And so, after having prescribed for my poor body, he went on to boast of the vigour of his own. He told me tales of his youthful prowess in fighting and hunting, in drinking and enduring hardship. But that brought him to a recollection of unsparing time, and after a little his brow clouded, he sighed gloomy sighs, and said: "Guru, I am younger than you, and my heart is sound, but who knows which of us two will die first!" Then he tried to take comfort in the fame that would be his after his death. But that proud word Fame has an echo, and the echo is Vanity. And presently a kind of groan burst from him, and he spoke with bitter sadness of his two unworthy sons. In the end he said: "There is no refuge but God." And on this he became silent. Then, a little later, in a tone of irritation he went back to what he had said to me first of all. "Every man," he declared, "must act after his own nature. I am a King, and Kings are the Vice-regents of the Deity. I have a divine strength which I myself cannot understand. Much less can you."

"Your Majesty," I replied, "all men partake of a divine strength which they cannot understand. But," I added sadly, "I confess that at this moment I feel very little of that strength in me."

He laughed, and began to question me about myself and the passing of my days; and presently I found myself describing to him the appearance, the character and the daily life of one, Narodi Das, a peasant who lives with his family in a hovel near to my home, a man I see every day. I had not gone far before he interrupted me. "To judge from your account," he cried angrily, "that man greatly resembles me." I was taken aback, for I suddenly realized that Narodi Das was in fact very like Akbar — not only in appearance but in character, and I wondered whether this resemblance had indeed been at the back of my mind as I spoke. Akbar saw my confusion, and this mollified him. With a laugh he bade me go on. So I described Narodi's unceasing struggle against starvation. I told him what I had seen with my own eyes year after year, and as I spoke I forgot that I was speaking with a purpose. I forgot both Akbar and myself; I forgot all the ordinary forms of respect. I interrupted when he spoke, and sometimes, I fancy, I must have

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flatly contradicted him. But these things did not matter, for he, like me, had stepped outside himself. He had entered into the life of Narodi Das. The person living that life had become real to him.

'At last we were both silent, and he plunged deep into thought. The wind flapped the canopy above us, the shadows were lengthening, the sun was dropping down to the west. Then Akbar struck his thigh and came out with a great oath. "After all I am an old man," he cried. "And God knows I have earned the right to do as I please."

'I lifted my head to gaze at him. "What does your Majesty please?" I asked dully.

'He made no answer, but plucked at the roll of flesh under his chin, and his eyes stared past me fiercely. Then all at once, raising his voice, he called for a scribe and a man came running out from under the arch. For a few minutes the scribe sat waiting pen in hand, while Akbar rolled about on his seat and furrowed his heavy brows. Then he began to dictate, interrupting himself occasionally to turn to me. "You heard that?" he would say, and "Well, Guru, are you satisfied with that?" I was astonished by the exactitude with which he remembered everything that I had said — even at the beginning, when he had seemed inattentive; and I also observed that even now he was using great circumspection and paying heed to detail. The two new edicts that he was issuing astonished me most, however, by their scope. They fulfilled my highest hopes. And, finally, he ordered that I should be furnished with copies immediately, in order that I should be able to deal at once with the present crisis in Daulatpur.'

The Guru had come to an end, and we looked at one another in a smiling silence. My heart was full. I rejoiced — not only for the Guru in his hour of triumph, not only for you and Mohan, but for the great, unhappy multitude. These edicts would lift from the poor some part at least of their misery.

I sat there dreaming until brought back to myself by a sound of cheering in the streets. This sound, which had arisen once or twice already during the Guru's narrative, now caught and held my attention, for it was certainly growing in volume. It now seemed to be coming from outside the city as well, as if the whole army in its encampment over the river were raising a shout of joy. The Guru, too, was listening to it with a look of surprise. At last I got up,



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telling him that I was going down into the street to inquire what was afoot.

Two minutes later I approached a group of men, who were talking together excitedly at the street-corner. What they told me seemed unbelievable; indeed, I did not believe it, but hurried on to make inquiries elsewhere. From everyone, however, the news was the same: Salim had made an offer of complete submission; his father had accepted it, and a great public scene of reconciliation was to take place the next day. The ceremony was to be in the square before the Dobri Palace, opposite the Southern Gate, at the third hour after noon.

WE went to bed very much perplexed, being unable to disbelieve what I had heard, and yet without any idea how it could be true. Had Akbar been in secret communication with Salim for some time? Nothing seemed less likely.

Early next morning I went out into the bazaar in search of further news, and very soon I came upon a great banner slung across the street, on which the time and place of the forthcoming ceremony were officially proclaimed. Had I known where Hari was to be found I should certainly have sought him out, for he might have had some light to throw upon the mystery; besides, I was anxious to see in what frame of mind he was awaiting his confrontation with Daniyal. There was some comfort in the thought that his ordeal had necessarily been postponed, and that in the great change which had come over the face of things it might possibly be spared him altogether.

A little before noon the Guru and I started out together to take up our stand in the square, for it was certain that the crowd would be great. But the throng so far exceeded our expectations that, early as we were, progress soon became impossible. Moreover, the noise, the press, and the heat quickly exhausted the Guru's strength, and I saw that it would be as much as he could do to make his way back home. On our return he lay down, and I would have stayed with him had he not insisted that I should make another attempt, by myself, to obtain some view of a spectacle that would always be famous in history.

As a matter of fact I had already thought of a plan. It had occurred to me that by climbing the citadel rock on its eastern side one would obtain a bird's-eye view of the whole scene; and the climb was likely to be difficult enough to prevent many others from attempting it. I was right. Having got to the base of the rock unimpeded, I managed to reach a ledge halfway up, where I could sit at ease with the whole spectacle spread out below me. I could even see something of what was going on outside the city wall. The soldiers had made a wide lane, down which — at the very moment when I cast my eyes in that direction — Salim with some twenty attendants was approaching. He was riding at a slow trot,

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and behind him in the distance I could see a dust-cloud, raised — as I was told — by a great train of elephants which he was bringing as a gift to his father.

When he arrived outside the Gate there was a pause, during which, I suppose, he was making ready for the next stage of his approach. A hush descended, to be broken presently by a sudden blaring of trumpets both inside and outside the city, and at the same time the great doors were flung open. Through them there now advanced the figure of Salim, looking very small in the vastness of the scene. He came on foot, down the wide lane that had been kept clear for him, with two followers walking at a little distance behind. The crowd that filled the square and choked every street and alley in the neighbourhood greeted him with a tremendous shout of welcome. From the city wall that was lined with soldiers there went up an ordered cheer, and all the pennons, banners, and flags of all the regiments in the Imperial Army were simultaneously waved in the sun. At that moment, I must confess, I was completely carried away and shouted with all my might.

As Salim drew nearer to the Dobri Palace I was able to see that he was carrying himself with dignity. At the foot of the steps he halted, and, kneeling upon a carpet of gold that glittered like a shield in the sun, made his first obeisance. At the top of the first flight another golden carpet had been spread for him, and there again he knelt.

Outside the door of the Palace stood Akbar, quite alone. Up till now he had made no movement. But, after Salim had completed his second obeisance, he stirred; he took four steps down to meet his advancing son, and when Salim was on the step immediately below him he raised his arms and threw them about his neck. Being much less tall than Salim, their two heads were nearly on a level, so that this embrace was admirably effective. The roars of the crowd increased in volume, again the trumpets sounded; and with one arm still about his son's shoulders, Akbar turned about and moved up the stair again. Then came a moment when, like everybody else, I expected him to face round once more, for it had been said that he was going to speak a few words to the people. But instead of this he went straight on up to the palace door. Moreover, that great door, which ought surely to have been flung open, remained shut, and he had to push at it quite hard in order to get in. The close of the spectacle was, accordingly, by no means

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impressive, and it took the crowd some minutes to realize that all was over.

On my way home I talked to several people to see whether they could give me any explanation of the unsatisfactory end of the ceremony. None could account for it. Nor had anyone the smallest ray of light to throw upon the circumstances leading up to the great event, although a story had already been invented to please the popular mind. It was recounted that two nights ago the prophet Mohammed had descended from Paradise and appeared before Salim, and said: 'Why did you not consult your astrologer upon the meaning of the falling star which recently I sent you as a sign?' And Salim was unable to reply. Whereupon the Prophet frowned, and, smelling wine in Salim's breath, he said: 'I command you to submit yourself to your father, for I know you to be a drunkard; and a drunkard is no better than a child. Go to Agra alone, and prostrate yourself before your father in humility. Thus shall you be forgiven by him and by Allah as well.'

After supper our host and his women-folk went out to look at the fireworks that were to be let off by the river, to examine Salim's five hundred gift-elephants, and to join in the general rejoicing. As for me, I had already wandered through the streets more than enough. I sat on the roof with the Guru.

We sat together, for the most part, in silence. These last two days had overwhelmed me with the unexpectedness and importance of their events. I tried to think, but my thoughts were as purposeless as monkeys leaping about in a tree. From the streets there came up a clamour louder and more confused than ever before — shouting, singing, cheering, music of every sort — and the upper air, too, was full of the soft crackle of exploding fireworks.

It must have been about midnight when we heard steps on the stair. I thought it must be our host, and great was my surprise when Hari made his appearance before us. The Guru stared at him, no less surprised than I, for the steps had been heavy and slow, quite unlike Hari's usual tread. At first I thought that some calamity must have befallen him, so pale and haggard was he, but, looking more closely, I received from his eyes and the set of his jaw a message of quiet triumph.

Dropping down upon the divan he asked for wine, and I made haste to pour him out some. While he was slowly but avidly drinking it, the Guru approached and stood looking down at him.

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When he had finished he raised his eyes, and, as he was excusing himself for his lack of ceremony, he smiled first at the Guru and then at me with a slow, secret smile.

It was plain that he had something important to tell us, but he wanted to hear our news first. Not until we had answered his questions, and received his congratulations, did his own story come. He told it so well that I should like to give his own words, but that would take too long.

You will remember that when I had last seen him he was moving like a sleep-walker down the long Palace corridor. In his hand was the letter which the Emperor had told him to give to the Chief Messenger on his way out. This letter — as you can well imagine! — he felt extremely disinclined to deliver; and as he walked along an idea sprang into his head. Desperately he struggled to give it shape, and by the time he got to the Great Gate it stood clear. So instead of delivering the letter to the Chief Messenger, he hid it in his tunic and hurried to a little house in a remote quarter of the city where there lives a letter-writer whom he happens to know well. This man, like most of his profession, is skilful in the art of forgery. 'And an excellent fellow as well,' said Hari, 'a man who never tampers with a letter except in a good cause.' Well! when Hari had explained what he wanted done, the man undertook the work gladly. Nor was it a difficult piece of work. All that was required was that the word *Daniyal* should be erased and the word *Salim* put in its place.

At this point no doubt Hari's plan shadows itself forth before you in a somewhat fantastical aspect, so let me hasten to explain its feasibility. Mabun Das was in Salim's camp, and Hari knew that he could get into touch with him quite easily. He knew, too, that Salim, elated by his military successes, was more or less drunk for twelve hours out of every twenty-four. He knew, moreover, that he could count on Mabun Das to help him — that is to say, to do his best to make Akbar's letter appear to Salim to be a brief and dignified appeal addressed by a forgiving father to a rebellious son.

The next step was a simple one. Hari's regiment happened to be posted opposite Salim's guards, and there had been a good deal of fraternizing already. Hari had merely to ride down to this part of the line, say that he was on a special and private mission, display the letter with its Imperial Seal, and everyone was ready to assist him. In less than three hours after leaving Akbar he was in Salim's

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camp, and had asked for Mabun Das. To Mabun he made no mystery of how the letter had been obtained, feeling sure that if his plan was feasible Mabun would try it. And Mabun then and there entered upon the scheme with a quiet, businesslike satisfaction. He told Hari that he would take the letter in to Salim at once, for it was now after sun-down, and the Prince would have had two or three cups of wine — just enough to make him feel amiable. But first he summoned a scribe and drafted a reply for Salim to send back to his father. This reply was skilfully composed so as to look like a spontaneous overture on the part of Salim.

Mabun then went into Salim's tent, and before long Hari was called in. Great was his delight when he found that Salim had already accepted and signed the reply that had been prepared for him. Moreover, the Prince, already somewhat drunk, was very ready to accept his assurances that Akbar's fatherly love had never been greater than now, that he was prepared to forgive everything, and was longing to welcome his son with open arms.

The uncertain and dangerous part of the business now lay before Hari: he had to take Salim's letter to Akbar and explain how he came by it. The fraternizing that had been going on between Salim's troops and Akbar's gave him an opening for a story which would, he thought, pass muster, for he could count on Akbar's being completely bewildered and more than a little pleased. Herein he proved to be right. Just as he had assured Salim that Akbar was ready to forgive, so now he assured Akbar that Salim was longing for forgiveness; and with Salim's letter there before him as evidence, Akbar could only rub his eyes in dumb amaze. He wrote a cautious but conciliatory reply, and from that moment the battle was won. But it was not an easy victory. The whole night through Hari went to and fro with letters; and at each end he had to bring all his gifts of persuasion into play, for both father and son were prickly with pride. Halfway through the negotiations an idea came into his head which did much to hasten his success. He spread the news abroad that a complete reconciliation had taken place, and ordered that there should be music and fireworks in the Imperial Camp. These fireworks excited the people to noisy demonstrations, and this was taken by Akbar as evidence that a reconciliation would be popular, and by Salim as proof positive that not only Akbar but the whole city was wild with joy at his magnanimous decision.

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Yet even so, when morning came, the Prince, who was suffering from his usual headache, felt much inclined to reverse that decision. Why, he asked himself, should he walk meekly into the city as a suppliant, when he could, if he chose, break into it as a conqueror? It required all Mabun Das's eloquence to keep him to his word.

Damayanti, is this not an extraordinary story? But I have not finished yet. The oddest, the most fantastic, part of it is yet to come. Hari, whose importance had been going up by leaps and bounds during this fateful night, had assumed control of the arrangements made for Salim's reception. At the time of the ceremony he and a brother officer, Rashik Singh, were in the hall of the Dobri Palace, looking out through a window by the side of the great door. These two had the duty of flinging open the door when the moment arrived for Akbar and Salim to come in. From his position by the window he could see everything clearly. His view commanded the whole square including the flight of steps at the top of which Akbar was standing. Akbar's great, broad back was in fact immediately in front of him. In a state of tense excitement he watched Salim's slow approach: he saw him make his obeisance; he saw Akbar step down and throw his arms about his son's neck; he saw him turn and come back to the top of the stairs. But now, instead of facing round and speaking the few words that were to bring the ceremony to a close, Akbar marched straight up to the Palace door, and, before Hari and Rashik Singh had found time to recover from their bewilderment, he was rattling at the handle and kicking at the panels like an angry child. For the two or three seconds that his face had been visible as he was approaching, it had presented, Hari says, an expression that was really extraordinary. Although his arm was still round Salim's shoulders, his face, inflamed with rage, was that of a fiend. What had happened to rouse this passion? Nothing! It had flared up of itself — a terrifying ebullition of feeling which demanded immediate outlet.

After they had come in and the doors had been closed behind them, there was a silence. A few moments passed during which nothing happened. The crowd outside had stopped cheering in the expectation of a speech. It was very still both outside and within. Akbar was now standing opposite Salim and glaring at him — and Salim's face wore a sheepish, apprehensive smile. Then suddenly there was a lightning movement, and the hall echoed to a resounding smack. Salim staggered back against the wall, completely dazed

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by a stinging box on the ear. Again there was a brief, appalling silence, and then Akbar proceeded to overwhelm his son with a flood of contemptuous abuse. 'To think,' he shouted, 'that a child of mine should play such a fool's part! With seventy thousand good men behind you you come cringing up to me like a starved and beaten dog! Well, I am going to treat you as you deserve.' And, seizing the unfortunate man by the scruff of the neck, he ordered Hari and Rashik to take him each by one arm and march him along. In this fashion Salim was hurried down a short passage leading to a Turkish bath. The small, heated chamber was opened, he was flung in, and the key turned in the lock.

This done, there came another dreadful, silent pause. Not a sound came from the bathroom, and the noise of the crowd, which was now again cheering as it dispersed, seemed to come from a long way off. Hari was chiefly aware of Akbar's heavy breathing, and, when he dared look up, the glare of his rolling eyes. Well can I believe that he and Rashik were both shaking in all their limbs. At last with a final gesture of contemptuous rage, the Emperor turned and strode away.



I THOUGHT I had come to the end of my Agra Journal, for the Guru and I went to bed in the belief that we should start on our return journey the next day. But early the following morning, a messenger from Abul Fazl appeared and instead of the edicts which we were expecting, he brought a letter.

The Guru frowned thoughtfully while writing his reply.

'Well?' I said anxiously, after the messenger had gone; and he answered that Abul Fazl, after assuring him that the edicts would be ready by noon, begged that he would call upon his father later in the day. For a moment I was puzzled, then, remembering who Abul-Fazl's father was, I began to understand the meaning of this request and why the Guru was still looking thoughtful.

'I shall have to go,' he said in a reluctant tone. 'Shaik Mobarek is a very old man; for many years he has occupied the highest position in the State; I could not refuse without appearing discourteous or . . .'

'Or what?'

'Afraid.'

I smiled, but I was troubled. Everything that I had ever heard my parents say about Mobarek came back into my mind, and I realized that he must of necessity feel very antagonistic towards the Guru. Without a doubt he would greatly disapprove of Akbar's new edicts. Moreover, having for many years given his powerful support to Daniyal as candidate for the Throne, he could not but regard the recent turn of affairs with utter disgust.

Punctually at noon two other messengers arrived. They were dressed in gorgeous liveries, and bore themselves with the ceremoniousness of men directly engaged upon the Emperor's service. Each carried a bag of bright green silk, and the Guru had no sooner set eyes upon these bags than he rose to his feet in order to receive them in a proper attitude of respect. They were fastened with a thick cord of woven silver thread, and at the ends of the cords were tassels heavy with gold. Not without great ceremony were these bags handed over, and then, after repeated salutations on both sides, the men withdrew.

The Guru passed one of the bags to me. 'Open it!' he said, while

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he opened the other himself. Inside were the copies of the two edicts.

We were still rejoicing when we set out for Mobarek's house. Our way took us through an old quarter of the town, and we halted in a narrow, empty lane before a door in an ancient wall. Inside was a court so austere that it might well have been part of a monastery. The servant who guided us along the cool, dusky passages kept silence and downcast eyes. He was clad in a monkish habit of a pattern that I had not seen before.

In a room that contained nothing but books we came upon Abul Fazl, who was munching a cake and reading at the same time. It is evident that the stories told about his appetite are not exaggerated. Through a doorway I had already seen the remains of a large meal, and indeed the whole building smelt of cooked meat and garlic. On seeing us he rose and bowed several times — without, however, changing his expression, which was grave and stupid. His body is very tall and very lean; he wears a high turban, and as I looked at him and remembered the ineptitudes in his *Life of Akbar* I felt much inclined to laugh.

'I will conduct you into my father's presence,' he said to the Guru, and then paused. He was eyeing me doubtfully, and blinking, and pulling at his long beard. The Guru had already introduced me; he now added that he would be glad if I might be permitted to attend him. Abul Fazl inclined his head, but morosely.

In the next room thirty or forty scribes were engaged in copying state documents. Their heads remained bent to their tasks as we went by. Abul Fazl led the way, looking round at us now and then as if to make sure that we were behaving properly. It was extraordinary to think that this man was the son of the proud and worldly Mobarek.

After proceeding for some distance in this fashion we were introduced to Mobarek in a small, light, airy room with a large window giving upon a garden court. He was looking a little older than I remembered him, but not much. His silvery hair was a little thinner, the lines in his face had deepened somewhat, his body seemed a trifle smaller and drier, but otherwise he was unchanged. He excused himself from rising to greet us, however, and the hand with which he motioned to us to sit down trembled exceedingly.

There was a brief silence while we took our places; then Abul Fazl began to speak. He kept a solemn, steady gaze upon the Guru, and

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his voice, which was monotonous, expressed nothing but varying shades of disapprobation. When he made a pause it was in the manner of a schoolmaster allowing time for his words to sink in.

'Of course there can only be one opinion among reasonable men upon the events of the last twenty-four hours. I will not insult your intelligence, Guru, by supposing that we differ in our estimate of the degree of permanence in the changes that we have seen taking place in the political aspect of the situation. My father was desirous of seeing you not because he supposed that your point of view was different from his but rather for an exchange of information and, possibly, for co-operation in action calculated to bring about a return to more satisfactory conditions with the minimum of friction or distress in *any* quarter — even, I may say, in that quarter which has been chiefly responsible for, or instrumental in, producing the present state of affairs which we both assuredly deplore.'

I had been expecting that his subject would be the Emperor's new edicts, but I was mistaken. Presently he began to refer to 'persons who cannot be taken seriously' and 'an irresponsible individual, whose influence is of course only temporary'; and then I grasped that he was talking about Hari. The part that Hari had played in reconciling Salim and Akbar was evidently most mysterious to him.

Mobarek in the meantime had a completely detached air, so that it was hard to tell whether he was listening or not. Old age seemed to have enfolded him in indifference. Occasionally he held up one of his thin hands and examined it from beneath drooping lids. He was obviously bored. But then, I suppose, he is well accustomed to being bored, and possibly his son did not seem to him more foolish than most men.

At last Abul Fazl wound up, lifted his chin, half closed his eyes, and waited. The position to which his tremendous discourse had brought him was simply that 'of course' not one single thing that had recently happened was to be 'taken seriously' — least of all the reconciliation between Akbar and Salim.

I looked at the Guru and waited.

'Well, Wazir, you may be right,' the latter returned simply and gently, 'but I must confess that I shall be surprised if Akbar does not keep friends with Salim.'

The contrast between this and what had gone before was extraordinary; and extraordinary was the effect of these few words on

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Abul Fazl. He opened his mouth once or twice but without producing any sound. All he could do was to stare glassily and pull at his long beard.

I glanced cautiously at Mobarek and thought I detected a faint smile about his lips.

'Guru,' he said, 'to what extent has Hari Khan been acting under your advice? That is what I should like to know.'

'The only advice I have ever given Hari was that he should be perfectly candid with Akbar.'

This reply made Mobarek give a little laugh. It was quite friendly, and the Guru joined in. I felt that the interview had suddenly entered upon a new phase.

'Hari and I have never discussed politics,' the Guru went on. 'Politics are not in my line. But I won't pretend that I'm not glad this reconciliation has taken place. I wish you could feel about it as I do.'

Mobarek pursed his lips, waved a hand, and said: 'Well, it is something to know that you don't share Hari Khan's responsibilities. They are considerable. May I ask you, as his friend, to give him a word of advice — from *me*?'

'Yes, certainly!'

'During the last twenty-four hours he has been taking vengeance upon people who — for one reason or another — have incurred his dislike. He has persuaded the Emperor to make numerous arrests.'

The Guru emitted a little sound of dismay.

'I felt sure you would disapprove,' Mobarek went on, 'and this is one of the reasons why I asked you to come and see me.'

'Thank you! I will certainly speak to Hari about it.'

'In behaviour like this he betrays an extraordinary short-sightedness. When these people are released from prison his position will become difficult — even dangerous.'

The Guru remained silent.

'It's a pity you are leaving Agra just at this moment.'

'I will speak to Hari before I go. But go I must. The peasants in Daulatpur are in great distress. For them these days are critical.'

Mobarek looked out of the window reflectively. 'If you are wise you will use those new edicts — sparingly. Let us hear as little about Daulatpur as possible during the next few months! The Emperor,

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as you know, is not very favourably inclined towards Prince Mohan, and — well, I think I have said enough.'

The Guru kept his eyes lowered for a minute, then he sighed and said: 'I'm afraid you don't like those edicts.'

This brought a smile to Mobarek's face. 'Your object is to lessen the burden laid upon the poor. With that I am in sympathy. In fact I am willing to use my influence with Akbar against the revocation of these new laws.'

The Guru gave him a look of surprise. 'I don't think Akbar will change.'

'No?' Mobarek raised his eyebrows. 'Just call to mind the number of times Akbar has revoked his own ordinances in the last few years! Your confidence will sag a little, Guru. But, as I have said, I'm willing to help you, if you will help me.'

The Guru took thought for a moment, then said: 'I can't ask you to support those edicts if you don't approve of them.'

'They could easily be redrafted in terms that would be acceptable to me. It's the preamble that I don't like.'

'In my opinion the most important part!' The Guru's eyes rested upon Mobarek gravely and steadily. 'In it Akbar defines what he holds to be the Rights of Man. It is also a profession of faith.'

Mobarek smiled, but coldly. 'You put those words into his mouth, Guru.'

The answer came with a headshake. 'One can't put words into Akbar's mouth.'

'Akbar,' returned Mobarek with visible impatience, 'is easily captivated by theories. And as quickly abandons them. — As for his faith' — and here the old man's voice became stern — 'you forget that he has already proclaimed that in the Din Ilahi. — Beware of creating confusion, Guru, where no confusion need exist! The State determines men's temporal duties and looks after their temporal welfare. Their spiritual welfare is safe in the hands of those appointed to guard it. If in my life I have been of any service to my fellow men it is in this: that, after studying the great religion of the West, I introduced into this land the idea of the Church. The Church is an institution by means of which man can satisfy — in the religious sphere — his desire for order, his respect for tradition, his craving for continuity.' A faint glow had risen to Mobarek's sunken cheeks and in his eyes there had awoken a frosty light. 'Church and State! On these I base the

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whole edifice of Society, Civilization, Culture. It is for you, like everybody else, to find your place within that frame.'

The Guru looked down and said nothing.

'Now,' Mobarek went on in a somewhat less didactic tone, 'you understand why I cannot approve your theories. Besides, in no case can a purely civil ordinance properly be linked to a vague and irrelevant disquisition.'

'My theories,' returned the Guru, 'amount to nothing more than that every man has the right to be treated as a person.'

'A person?'

'Yes. As a person — and not merely as a member of a category or class.'

Mobarek half closed his eyes. 'Your theories, if I am not deceived, carry certain practical implications. And those are objectionable — just-as the theories themselves are obnoxious and false. The servant does *not* feel himself to be the equal of his lord, nor does the lord feel himself to be on the level of his servant. — But,' he went on impatiently, 'I had not intended to enter into discussion of this sort with you. Between those who have practice in government and those who theorize about government, there is an unbridgeable gulf. Let me go back to what I was saying before. Within a limited field we might be of service to one another. I can help you to . . .' His voice faded out, his eyes narrowed, and, glancing round, I saw why. For the Guru was sadly shaking his head.

'We don't believe in the same things,' he said.

They were deep, soundless moments that followed. Mobarek's face changed, and all at once I felt that the conversation was coming to its close. For a full minute the two men looked at one another; then drily and, as it were, indifferently, Mobarek said: 'Well, if that is really so . . .'

'You see,' the Guru went on in a low voice, 'for one thing, I believe in the essential goodness of human nature.'

At this Mobarek closed his eyes and smiled. His face looked like a death-mask. Then he replied simply, 'I see.' And with those words he turned his head and looked out into the sunny garden.

I don't know how long we continued to sit there in silence. Abul Fazl may have said something to suggest that the interview was over, but I am not sure. The strong evening light was causing Mobarek to blink; his thin lips had compressed themselves and were invisible,

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giving him the aspect of a weary, old woman. As for the Guru, his head was now sunk upon his breast and his forehead wrinkled in thought. He was quite unaware that Mobarek was waiting for him to go away.

At last, however, looking up and seeing how matters stood, he gave a quick smile, and, murmuring an apology, made as though to get up.

But Mobarek now put out a hand. 'I am curious to know what you were thinking. Are you willing to tell me?'

The Guru gave a little laugh. 'Certainly, I am!'

Nevertheless, having said this, he hesitated.

Mobarek waited impassively.

The Guru lifted his head again, and in his eyes there was that look of absolute honesty which puts his word above question. 'I was asking myself whether I was quite sure that Akbar would not withdraw or modify those edicts, and I came to the conclusion that I was quite sure.'

For a minute stillness reigned again. Then Mobarek said: 'If you are right, you have done great harm.'

The Guru made no answer.

'You have acted irresponsibly,' the old man went on, his voice gaining in harshness and strength. 'Prompted by personal vanity and blind self-confidence you have meddled in affairs of which you understand nothing. What is one to say to a man who pushes contemptuously aside the wisdom that has been laboriously garnered by his forefathers? The deep wisdom, the sacred wisdom, enshrined in the traditions, institutions, and observances which he has been privileged to inherit?'

'It is true that from our forefathers we inherit nearly everything; but surely not all is equally good?'

'And you discriminate by the light of your own intelligence?' sneered Mobarek. 'By the light of our common, human nature which, I suppose, is wise as well as good?'

The Guru pondered. 'It certainly holds the seeds of wisdom. Where else should they be? In a sense we are all born to wisdom: I mean, as a child is wise. But we need experience to develop our wisdom. And each man must find his own. The wisdom of another is not *my* wisdom, just as his goodness is not *my* goodness. And only *my* wisdom and *my* goodness are going to work *my* salvation. Neither the one nor the other can be imposed.'

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Abul Fazl's expression showed that indignation had been gradually accumulating in him. He now took a deep breath. 'May I inquire,' he pronounced ponderously, 'whether it has ever occurred to you that the questions upon which you have been exercising your mind have exercised the minds of others before you, and that the record of their meditations may possibly be of some value? Are you prepared to deny that their pronouncements constitute a body of some authority? Do you wholly ignore or reject . . .'

The Guru interrupted him. 'I neither reject nor ignore — it is not in my power to ignore — any voice, either living or dead, that speaks words that strike into me as true. When from among the dead someone addresses me and I enter into relation with him, then it is as though a friend walked by my side. But what is this body of authority of which you speak? It is a mound of corpses.'

Again indignation rendered Abul Fazl speechless, and it was Mobarek who stepped into the breach.

'My friend,' he said — and never have those words had a less friendly ring — 'you are not a thinker, and your naivete disarms me. But there is one charge which I feel bound to press home — the charge of presumptuousness. Your theories are but an extension of your personal vanity. You seek to glorify human nature because your own nature is human. But such individualism is not merely anarchic, it is impious. In attempting to exonerate the individual at the expense of society, you forget that it is in Society — in its traditions, its institutions — nay, in its very structure — that we discern most clearly the guiding hand of God. If Society is imperfect it is because its members are imperfect; but some are less imperfect than others, and it is right — as it is also inevitable — that the higher creature should discharge the higher function.'

The Guru shook his head disconsolately. 'There will always be differences of endowment among men; but why choose this to build upon instead of our common humanity? There we are on firm ground, elsewhere we stumble. Who is the higher creature? He certainly is not who thinks of himself as such. And what is the higher function? The highest that we know are equally within the range of all men.'

At this Mobarek exchanged glances with his son. They were agreed that further talk would be a waste of time. The Guru gathered his garments about him and rose slowly to his feet. But before turning to the door he stood still, looking sadly at the old



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man before him. 'Is it really impossible to put a little more faith in human nature? We have tried the other method for so long, and it has not led us to anything good.'

'I don't think I understand you,' returned Mobarek superciliously.

'What I mean is this: where there is no faith in human nature the government must always depend, ultimately, upon the maintaining of ignorance and the telling of lies.'

Mobarek eyed the Guru with cold dislike. 'I will be blunt with you,' he answered in a tone of curt finality. 'Civilization demands of its leaders that they should look upon the multitude as units of work and effort. It is the statesman's task to direct this work and effort to the common good. He must estimate the capabilities of the men beneath him and utilize them. His eyes are fixed upon a glorious goal. Only the man who is without a vision of greatness wishes to abolish this formative mastery. Your cloudy, fanatical theories ignore alike hard reality and the goal that can be reached by the force of ambition and will.'

'No!' returned the Guru in a voice that had become stern. 'There is no greatness at the end of your road — only despair. Spirit, which must stream through the individual man, if he is to preserve a sane and living soul, must stream through society as well. Every civilization, every culture, that has ever existed has owed its life to this. When the stream carries the body politic stiffens into a prison-house; forms and institutions become manacles, and the State turns into a monstrous slave-driver. Demonic forces have taken control. With the leaders there is only a semblance of leadership. As a monster the State moves on to a ruinous destiny. The leaders will tell you that they are acting under divine inspiration, or that they are obeying inexorable laws; and always they will dangle before the multitude the vulgar emblems of an impossible glory. But there is death in their hearts. Your priests, too, will pretend to enclose the Spirit in Churches. But those churches will be empty. Spirit is waiting in the market-place — waiting for the re-awakened and re-awakening man.'

Having spoken, the Guru inclined himself, and Mobarek returned his salute. I bowed in turn, and Abul Fazl escorted us to the door.

A servant was outside. He led us back through the same rooms and passages, but this time the copying clerks raised their heads, and tittered and whispered, as we went by.

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## PART SIX

THE light was fading. A clear sky and a still air made the close of day luminous and quiet. For as far as the eye could see over the great plain nothing was moving — nothing but a distant column of smoke; nor was there anything for the ear to hear but the distant creak of a water-wheel and the faint barking of a dog.

To Jali, standing outside the Guru's tent, the particular quiet of this hour brought memories of home. He remembered how as a small boy he used to stand on the balcony of his room just before going to bed and wait for the notes of a horn, the sunset call, blown in a desert camp some distance from the town. That memory had a peculiar persistence.

His eyes were now fixed upon the place, where, a few miles to the north, the long, straight line of the plain was broken by the tableland of Laku. Those cliffs, flushed by the setting sun, shone with a brilliance that made the sky behind seem dark. As he gazed, his mind was filled with thoughts of Damayanti, and the words of the poet rose to his lips 'Deep undulations of the ocean under a windless sky. Thus my heart.'

Presently the Guru came out of the tent, but the young man remained lost in his dreams until he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder; then, turning with a smile, he said: 'To-morrow, at about this hour we shall be there.'

'Yes, we shall be there.'

After a minute, removing his gaze from the tableland, he faced round to the south 'Look, Guru!' and he pointed.

The other shaded his eyes. 'What do you see, my son?'

'I see a little rise with some trees on it. Their trunks just catch the light.'

After a moment the Guru nodded and gave a smile. 'I believe you are right. You have good eyes — and a good memory too.'

They took their evening meal outside the tent, sitting on the sun-baked earth, and while they ate the sky above them grew bright with stars. It was close upon midnight when the Guru got up, but Jali, who had been silent for some minutes, put out a hand to detain him. 'Tell me,' he said, 'is it my fancy, or do I really see a glow in

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the sky out there?' He was indicating the tableland which now stood forth as a dark mass against the starry heavens.

The Guru stood still for a minute, then he replied: 'No! you are not mistaken. I see it too — a fire.'

'But not — not in the direction of Hawa Ghar?'

'I think not. Hawa Ghar is more to the left. It might be the village of Nurabad that is burning.'

A troubled silence fell upon them while they continued to stare into the darkness. But after another minute the Guru gave a little laugh. 'Why didn't I think of it before! The villagers are firing the grass. It is a thing they always do at this season. We can go to bed with our minds at rest.'

He stepped into the tent, but it was some time before Jali stretched himself out on his bedding and closed his eyes. He was sleeping in the open, and the night that encompassed him seemed to his disturbed imagination to be full of a vague disquiet. Its very stillness had a treacherous feel. At length he fell asleep, but only to wake up an hour later with a start. He sat up and noticed at once that the sky above the tableland was still coloured with a faint, rusty red.

Rising, he went over to where the camp-servants were sleeping, but not one of them stirred. There was a group of mud huts, however, a hundred yards away, so he walked on, and in a few minutes the starlight showed him a group of old men squatting beside a wall. Their murmur stopped as he approached.

He asked: 'What is that glow up there? Are they burning grass?'

An answer came from several mouths at once. No, it was not grass. Something else was burning.

'Then what?'

No one replied; looking at one another, they mumbled among themselves.

'Could it be dead trees?' Jali suggested.

They shook their heads. No, it was not dead trees.

'One of the villages, then?'

That was more likely. Some bad men had been seen going up there.

Jali turned and hurried back. He was now profoundly disturbed and intended to rouse the Guru.

A little later the two had made ready and were about to start. By riding fast they hoped to reach the plateau in three hours — soon

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after sunrise. They were taking nothing with them excepting their two precious rolls of parchment. The servants were to follow with tent and baggage as soon as it grew light.

Jali went first along the narrow track. Obligated by the darkness to keep a sharp look-out, he had no opportunity to indulge his imagination, but he felt anxious all the same. The gorge was reached more quickly than he had expected; and from this point onwards the road, although steep, was good. Without sparing their horses they pushed forward briskly, and the sun had only just risen when they came out on to the level upland.

Here for the first time a halt was made, and while their steaming mounts were recovering their wind, Jali let his eyes wander over the prospect before him. Mile upon mile of tawny grass was rippling in the breeze, the sun was pouring a rosy flood across it, and large white clouds were sailing overhead. It seemed to him as if the plateau itself had been caught up in the movement of the sky; it seemed to sail, to float, an island in the air.

Not many moments, however, had gone by before his attention was arrested by a moving point a mile or so away. While he was watching it, it defined itself as someone on horseback, and a minute later he could see that the rider was a woman. Could it be Damayanti? He continued to strain his eyes, and in a few seconds more became certain that it was.

With a cry he raised himself in his stirrups and waved. But she had already seen and recognized the two riders, she had already swerved from her course. Where could she be going at such a headlong pace at this hour?

Flushed and dishevelled, she drew up beside them. 'Guru! Jali!' Her breath came in gasps. 'How wonderful to find you here!' Never, thought Jali, had he seen her looking more lovely than at this moment; she seemed to him to be the very spirit of this breezy, sunflushed height. 'And your good news, which I got the day before yesterday! Oh, Guru!' Springing from her horse, she ran up to the old man and flung her arms round his neck. As he watched her, Jali was lifted up on the wings of an emotion he had never known before. Damayanti's beauty, the beauty of the morning, the beauty of life as adventure — these all joined together to make a fountain of joy in his heart.

'Yes, this is like a miracle!' she cried out again. 'I don't know what I should have done all by myself. But with your help — and the help of what you are bringing from Akbar . . .!'

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Her story was that two or three small villages had been burnt to the ground in the night and several peasants killed. Moreover, Mohan being in Daulatpur, and Rabindra having gone to the Summer Palace, the 'bad men', bent on making the most of this opportunity, were now on their way to Nurabad, the biggest village on the plateau, where the looting and killing would be on a much larger scale, unless something could be done to prevent it.

Every minute was important, so now they remounted and set off rapidly in the direction of Nurabad. His gaze fixed on Damayanti, who went a few yards ahead, Jali rode along in a trance of delight. With her before his eyes he had no thought to give to the victims of the night's attack, nor did his mind dwell on the encounter in prospect. The present moment was all sufficient; it filled his being completely.

In about twenty minutes the village came in sight. It appeared as a large, scattered cluster of low houses, whose roofs barely showed above the sea of grass and wild cane that surrounded it. Nowhere was anyone to be seen. While still a few hundred yards from the village, the riders drew up and looked about them.

'We seem to be in time,' said Damayanti, 'or it may even be that . . . ' she broke off, as a faint but menacing clamour swept along upon the wind. Made up of wild singing and shouting, it evoked vividly enough the spectacle of a drunken mob; and presently two or three gun-shots rang out. These sounds, however, came not from the village but from somewhere to the north of it.

Damayanti turned to the Guru. 'I didn't know they had guns. That means that Moti Singh is at the back of this.' Her eyes, as they wandered over her two companions, were dark with anxiety. 'I'm afraid they may kill you,' she murmured.

The Guru shook his head. 'No, no! they won't want to do that. When they see who I am, and when I show them . . . ' He turned to Jali, who had already detached from his saddle the two bags which contained the Emperor's edicts. 'Yes! when they see us coming as messengers from Akbar himself . . . Give me one of those, Jali, and let me ride on ahead.'

As he was speaking a band of men emerged into view about half a mile away. They had evidently been advancing along some depression in the ground which had kept them concealed. If this advance-guard was to be cut off before it reached the village there was no time to be lost.

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The Guru took one of the bags, but Damayanti, a look of determination on her face, caught hold of his reins. 'Wait! I'm a woman, and they won't shoot at me. Let me . . . '

Jali heard no more. Setting spurs to his horse, he cantered quickly forward to intercept the advancing company; and as he went he waved his green silken bag like a banner over his head. Its golden cords and tassels flashed bravely in the sun, and he shouted at the top of his voice; 'Allahu Akbar! A message from the Emperor!'

Yells of derision at once answered him, but he was still at a distance which made it doubtful whether his words had been understood or his token recognized for what it was. He rode on, and was within easy speaking distance of the men when a volley rang out. His horse shuddered, reared, and swung round with a suddenness that nearly unseated him. Having regained control and once more faced the band, he perceived that he was not alone. The Guru had come abreast of him, and not many yards behind was Damayanti.

'Keep back!' he shouted in sudden anger. 'What is the use . . . '

His words were drowned in a rattle of musket-shots, and to his consternation the Guru's horse plunged to the ground. He was about to dismount, but Damayanti was before him, and seeing her at the Guru's side, he continued to advance towards the mob.

They had halted, and now there came a few moments of profound stillness. The leaders, watching the effect of their last volley, appeared uneasy. It seemed to Jali that the meaning of his shouts and the significance of his token had at last reached them. Still quietly moving forward, he called upon them in the name of the Emperor to be gone, and as he did so they retreated, sullenly dispersing before him.

There was a patch of tall cane near by, and into this they disappeared like animals taking cover. For a few minutes he was doubtful about their intentions, but, when he saw them reappear at the other end of the cane-break and hurry in furtive flight towards the edge of the plateau, he knew that no more trouble was to be feared.

Two hours later he was still sitting with Damayanti at the Guru's side. The latter had been thrown clear of his horse, but stunned by the fall. No bones were broken, nor did the bruise on his head seem to be severe, but as his unconsciousness persisted, they decided to let him lie quietly where he was until the arrival of the litter that had been sent for from Hawa Ghar. A few strips of cotton stretched

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upon staves protected him from the sun. Water, too, had been fetched from the village; and pieces of silk torn from Jali's turban made compresses which Damayanti applied at intervals to his head.

Another hour had to pass before the litter could arrive. The sun was now high in the sky, the morning breeze was dying down, and although long silvery undulations still moved across the plain, in this small, enclosed space where the long grass had been trodden flat, the air seemed to be without a stir.

The two watchers sat together in an almost unbroken silence. Already the excitements of the morning seemed very far away. Screened in by the tall, thick grass-stems, which rose higher than their heads, they were isolated in a little world where there was no life but the life of the grass and of the insects that inhabited it. The air murmured with the vibration of innumerable, transparent wings, and this shimmering sound which was everywhere, rose, when a bee came close, to a note of tremendous busyness. There was, too, another ubiquitous sound, a tiny, multitudinous patter, as of rain-drops, made by the grasshoppers jumping from blade to blade. Otherwise all was silent. Silent were the yellow butterflies that dropped down in sudden clouds, fluttered along the ground as if in search, and then rose up again to disappear over the wall of grass.

Jali, now lying full length, his head propped up on his hand, had his eyes fixed dreamily upon Damayanti, who was fanning the Guru's face to keep the flies away. She, too, appeared to be lost in a dream, her hand moving mechanically, her gaze unseeing. Dressed for riding, she wore a thin silk tunic, bound by a broad sash at the waist, and voluminous trousers of a stronger silk, which were caught round her ankles by the soft leather of her riding-boots. The thin silk clung to her breast and shoulders which were moist with sweat; her bare arms glistened with an ivory polish, and her braided hair, which she had wound tightly round her head, now hung in loops over her ears. At this moment she looked very like Savriti.

As he gazed at her Jali let his wandering imagination carry him deeper and deeper into fantasy. He made her his own age, or perhaps just a little younger. She was ready for courtship, and he courted her. And they were both in love. Here, in this secret retreat, he was telling her how he loved her; here with the smell of the crushed grass rising about them, and the sun's drowsy heat sinking

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into them, he was taking her into his arms. Marriage stood before them — unutterable happiness!

But no! it was all unreal. None of that happiness could ever be his. He would have to live his life without it.

His pain suddenly became so acute that, without knowing what he was doing, he got up. With his back turned to Damayanti, he stared out over the shimmering grass. A little way off a flock of small yellow birds emerged like a swarm of flying-fish, flew a short distance, and then dropped down into invisibility again. The sight seemed to focus his unhappiness. It became deeper than anything he had imagined possible. He had no inclination to weep, but he felt himself labouring for breath.

Damayanti's voice came to him softly from where she sat. 'Can you see anyone on the way from Hawa Ghar?'

He shook his head and managed to say: 'Not yet.'

Why was it given to men to imagine what might have been? To imagine happiness so clearly and know that it could never be grasped? Why? why?

Then, of a sudden and half furtively, he glanced round, and had a brief vision of the Guru's head lying on its cushion of grass. Above the Guru's face, so calm with its closed eyes, he saw Damayanti's thin, childlike hand moving; and by some trick of attention he noticed what he had not consciously noticed before — her emerald ring, that was a gift from Mohan. In the same instant, resignation swept over his heart. 'My thoughts,' he said to himself, 'have been the thoughts of a child.'

But it was sad. It was sad beyond all telling. For his childish longings seemed to him to be a part of his very humanity; and his enlarged vision — the vision of the God in man — was not a happy one. How should it be happy, he reflected, when it accepted disappointment and frustration as necessities, and made its acceptance without any understanding?

At last he turned and went back to his former place. Damayanti was bending over the Guru and looking at him intently.

'I think he will wake soon,' she said. 'Just now his eyelids flickered.'

When she straightened herself her eyes sought his, and at once something seemed to communicate itself between them. It was almost as if she had guessed what was going on in him while he stood gazing over the grass. He met her eyes steadily, and in a voice



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that was not like his own heard himself saying: 'Everything that I want most is impossible.'

She put out her hand and took his. 'Jali, my dear — don't feel so sad!' Her voice was warm and low. She shook her head and said — half to herself: 'Life is like that — but not all the time.'

'It has not been like that for you. No! you have Mohan.'

She continued to look at him — but more and more dreamily, and at last she took back her hand and sighed. 'I should like you to know something more about my life.' Her gaze was deep, and in the depths of it he saw her thoughts moving, but he could form no idea of what they were. 'I am very fond of you,' she went on sadly, 'and I think it would help you to know more.'

'Then tell me.'

'I can't. For one thing, there isn't time.' She paused, as if reluctant to go on. 'Jali dear, very soon — most likely to-morrow — I shall have to go to Kishtwar. My father is dying, and I want to get to him as quickly as I can.'

Jali turned his face away.

She put out her hand again and took his. 'I shall soon be back — and you will still be here. At least, that is what I hope.'

These last words were spoken with such gentleness that all at once he felt consoled. He drew a deep breath, faced round again, and gave a nod. It would not be good-bye for ever — no! it would not be that. From this small mercy he drew what comfort he could.

It was early in the morning of the next day that they parted. He had ridden with her to the edge of the plateau, and stood watching her until a bend of the road hid her from view. Now she was gone. With a frown of pain he turned his horse's head in the direction of Hawa Ghar.

The day was sunny, but less brilliant than the day before, and there was no wind. 'It is going to be very hot,' he thought, 'hot and still.' He dreaded the hours of solitude that awaited him in the empty house. Savitri and Rabindra were away, and the Guru, who had returned to consciousness with a very severe headache, was lying in bed in a darkened room.

As he rode slowly along through the tall, sweet-smelling grass and looked at the days that lay before him, he felt that the hand of God had descended to bring him to a halt, and give his unhappiness time to work upon him in the way it should. Every minute his dread of reaching Hawa Ghar increased, for his imagination told him how ghostly quiet the house would be, and how the image of Damayanti would rise up in every room. Even from a distance the house seemed to wear a deserted air.

His first act on getting back was to visit the Guru. With care he opened the door and peeped in. The Guru made no stir, so he shut the door again and moved silently away.

For several days life went by in the stillness and solitude that he had been dreading, and then, one evening when he looked in, he found the Guru sitting up in bed; and the voice that came to him out of the semi-darkness was no longer the voice of a sick man but cheerful and strong. Going across to the window, he pulled back the shutters to let the golden evening light into the room; and when he saw the Guru's face he cried out in delight. 'Ah! you are better at last!'

And the Guru answered with a little laugh: 'Yes, much better. In fact I think I am well.'

'But you must be careful. Damayanti warned me.'

After fetching some milk, he sat down by the bedside, and they began to talk. He was surprised when his companion told him that he had had a conversation with Damayanti on the morning of her

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departure. 'And,' said the Guru smilingly, 'we were talking about you.'

The colour rose in Jali's cheeks. 'As we rode over the plateau together she told me that she had given you her diary, but I didn't think you had been well enough to have any talk with her.'

'Yes. She gave me her diary to read. And I think you know why.'

To this Jali made no answer.

'She wants you to know more about her. She wants me to tell you all that I know about her. And that happens to be a good deal.'

Again Jali remained silent, and after a moment the Guru went on: 'She is very fond of you, and that of course is why she wants it. I was very glad when she said that I might tell you her story. It will interest you.'

Jali's eyes were fixed upon the Guru in a long, deep look. 'When will you begin?' he asked.

'If you like — now.'

*Here follows The Story of Mohan and Damayanti. It is given, not as the Guru told it, but more fully. The Guru told it, certainly, with a great wealth of knowledge and understanding, but the author, whose privilege — and, possibly, duty — it is to be omniscient in regard to his creatures, wishes the reader to share his advantage.*

### THE STORY OF MOHAN AND DAMAYANTI

At the time when this story opens Chandra Singh was Rajah of Daulatpur, and his sons Mohan and Bhoj were twelve and ten years old. One morning, as the two boys were taking their usual ride, a great storm of rain swept over the countryside, and their tutor, finding himself near the Guru's dell, bade his pupils dismount and take refuge there. So violent was the wind, so fierce the beating of the rain, that the little boys could scarcely stand upright. While their tutor was tying up the horses they began the descent of the cliff, Mohan first, then Bhoj. Both of them were frightened, for this storm was fiercer and more sudden than any they had seen before, and the path down the cliff was narrow. Buffeted by the wind and dazzled by the lightning, they crept along slowly, and had only got halfway down, when Mohan felt something strike him heavily in the back, so that he was knocked over and fell. After that he knew nothing, until, opening his eyes, he found himself lying on the Guru's bed under a light coverlet. This was a great surprise, and he couldn't conceive

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what had happened. The Guru was standing by the bed, smiling at him. 'Where's Bhoj?' the boy asked, and then burst out laughing, though he could hardly have said why.

'Bhoj has gone home. How do you feel? Does your head ache?'

'I feel very well, thank you. — But what's become of my clothes?' So speaking he laughed again, for he had just noticed that he had nothing on.

'Your clothes are drying,' said the Guru. 'The rain had soaked them.'

Then suddenly he remembered the storm and everything. But the storm had now gone; sunshine was coming in through the window and the open door. He felt bewildered, but the Guru, laying a hand on his bare shoulder, said smilingly: 'There is nothing to worry about. Bhoj slipped and knocked you over; and you both fell down the cliff. But you are all right, and Bhoj has got off with nothing worse than a broken collar-bone. Your tutor has just taken him home. You are to stay here with me for an hour or so. Do you mind?'

Mohan shook his head, then smiled, and a moment later, his eyes falling upon Panchi-Nur the monkey, who was shivering in a corner, he broke into laughter once again. 'Oh, look at him! Look at his fur! He wants me to dry him.' And before the Guru could reply he was out of bed and chasing the monkey round the room. Panchi-Nur ran out on to the grass, but, finding it wet, came in again and allowed himself to be caught.

'I'll get you a towel for Panchi-Nur,' said the Guru, turning to the door. 'And I expect your own clothes are dry again by now.'

Coming back a moment later, he found the boy scampering about naked in the sunshine outside. There was certainly nothing amiss with him. 'Here you are!' he called out.

But Mohan was trying to climb up on to the brimming stone trough. 'I am going to bathe in your well. I am going to dive into your well.'

The Guru said nothing, but his smile disappeared.

Mohan glanced round at him, desisted, and came back. 'I wasn't really going to get in,' he said.

The Guru handed him a towel, and he fell to rubbing Panchi-Nur with it, until the monkey, taking the cloth from him, proceeded to dry himself. At this the boy looked up, met the Guru's eyes, and they both laughed.

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ignorance their line of defence, and defended their ignorance with great skill. And meanwhile the peasants were dying. But soon his opportunity came.

His father had arranged a tiger-hunt. It was to be a formal affair with a procession to and from the hunting-ground which would be ceremonious in the extreme. Mohan visited the headmen of the neighbouring villages and ordered that the return route should be lined with the dying and the dead. And so it came about that the Rajah on his elephant found himself riding in state down a gristly avenue. The dead lay stiff and still; those who were dying raised their arms and filled the air with a thin, unending wail. The Rajah could not but ride on. His eyes looking straight before him, his face expressionless, he rode on; but the wail went into his ears.

After this Mohan was sent to Agra to join the Imperial Guard. To his surprise, he found a soldier's life not altogether disagreeable to him; and his father had the satisfaction of seeing him become a good officer, a favourite of the Emperor's, a man well liked at the Imperial Court. He was away on a campaign when the old man died. The Rajah remained true to himself up to the end. A few minutes before he breathed his last his old body-servant, who had waited on him for over forty years, bent over the bed where he lay half-conscious and cried out in an agony of grief: 'O my master, it is I! Do you not know me? Do you not know who is entreating you?'

The dying man collected his strength. 'My servant,' he pronounced faintly but with a discernible stiffness. And these were his last words.

On receiving news of his father's death Mohan obtained leave of Akbar to return to Daulatpur, and on his way home, whilst reviewing his position, he made many good resolutions. He would offend no sensibilities, he would be patient with Bhoj; the reforms that he had in mind should be introduced slowly, tactfully. Little by little a new order would arise, but those who had been dreading sudden changes would be neither scandalized nor hurt.

He had not been twenty-four hours in Daulatpur, however, before he began to see that his capacities were not quite what he had imagined them. And, as the days and weeks passed by, this difference between forecast and reality grew no less. The forces of inertia, passive obstruction, and cunning defeated him completely.

One night, some three months after his return, as he was lying

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awake in bed, he broke into a long, loud laugh. 'Yes,' he said to himself unhappily, 'this is really comic! I must go to the dell to-morrow and describe it all to the Guru.'

But his talk, although conducted on a flippant note, had its moments of seriousness. He was unable to conceal the fact that he was suffering from a very painful sense of frustration. His desire was simply to do good. Why was it so difficult? Why did everybody oppose him?

To these thoughts, he gave no direct expression, but while he walked up and down the grass of the dell, now frowning, now laughing at his own rather bitter jests, the Guru, who was seated upon his mat, watched him with a sympathy and affection that were sometimes tinged by impatience and sometimes by pity. This tall, handsome, young man, who was by nature so exceedingly — perhaps excessively — considerate, would he ever realize that not all sensibilities were worthy of consideration? He had certainly not yet learnt that nearly every choice is a choice between two evils.

When Mohan said: 'None of this is going to be easy. I know that!' the other continued to look down upon the ground, and made no attempt at a denial. 'But you must help me,' Mohan went on. 'I want to make a fresh start.'

'Indeed I will do all I can,' returned the Guru.

'I have to go to Agra to-morrow to take my oath of allegiance as Rajah. And I believe Akbar is thinking of sending me off on a mission to Kishtwar. But that won't be a long business, and then we'll start in earnest.'

DAMAYANTI, dressed in an apple-green muslin sari edged with silver, ran down the Palace steps into the garden. She was laughing and chattering, and behind her came a girl of about the same age who was laughing and chattering too. Neither was listening to what the other said, and neither expected to be listened to. At the foot of the shallow, stone steps Damayanti stopped, glanced up at an open window and gave a call. But nobody came. So she dropped down on the lichen-spotted stone and continued her chatter at the point at which she had broken off.

It was cloudless autumn weather. The sun, although not yet high, was already hot, but in the air there still lingered the night's coolness. Frost had lightly touched the garden that ran down to the lake, and the long slopes of the hill opposite were powdered with the first snow of the year.

'The water will be rather cold,' Damayanti ran on, 'but I don't mind; do you?' And then, without waiting for an answer: 'By the way, about your wedding, Mayura darling, of course I shall be there! Akbar — poor old thing! — will have to wait. And as he already has six wives he oughtn't to find it very difficult. Besides, he has never even seen me, so he can't be exactly eating his heart out! You know, I don't really think of this affair as a marriage at all. And why should I? It's just a piece of — of diplomacy, like any other.' She paused. 'I wonder if I shall ever fall in love — and marry properly — like you. Perhaps, after Akbar is dead. And after . . .'

The sentence remained unfinished, but Mayura knew what the missing words were. How many times had Damayanti not said to her: 'I shall never be able to leave father — never! We mean too much to one another. It won't be possible.'

For the first time a brief silence fell, then Damayanti went on: 'Father is going to insist that I shall spend at least half the year here, and I'm determined to make it more, if I can. — But let's go back to your wedding. You simply must have plenty of jewels. If your father weren't so fantastically honest you would be glittering from head to foot all the time. Why should you suffer for this conscientiousness? The least I can do is to lend you some of mine.'

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At this moment a little, wizened, old woman appeared at the top of the steps and came down towards them. 'O my dove!' She spoke in a voice that was singularly gentle and sweet. 'The Wazir is outside; he wishes to speak with you. And the Maharajah has sent for you as well.'

Damayanti made a little grimace. 'The Wazir again! Tell him, Ratnivara darling — tell him that I have gone to the swimming-pool.'

The old nurse shook her head smilingly. 'But he says it's very important.

'Well, tell him that I am naked in the water, but that he can come, if he likes.'

Still smiling her tranquil smile, Ratnivara sat down on the step and turned her face up to the sun. 'I would not offend the Wazir's ears with such jests.'

Damayanti sighed, bent forward to kiss her, then abruptly got up. 'I suppose I must go.' She turned to the other girl. 'But I shan't be long; so as soon as Sūshi appears, take her down to the pool. Don't wait for me; I'll join you there.'

She went in, and passing through the women's apartments, proceeded to a hall in which several important-looking personages were standing about. Among them was the Wazir, a stout man with a large, intelligent face completely surrounded by hair. As soon as he saw Damayanti he bowed low, approached her with dignified gait, and bowed low again. Then, before she could open her mouth, he began to speak. He spoke rapidly in a deep, husky whisper, and, as he did so, pointed from time to time to a passage in a lengthy document which he had unrolled. It was remarkable to see this grave official addressing himself to the young girl in the manner that he would have used towards a colleague. Having finished, he rolled up his parchment and handed it over, breathing a sigh of relief. 'You will have no difficulty with your father, Princess, I assure you. The Maharajah had a good night. May Rama reward you for your good offices.'

Damayanti smiled on hearing these words which were the Wazir's usual formula when charging her with a task which he himself shrank from. Besides, it was untrue that the Rajah had passed a good night. She had already been into his room and found him extremely petulant. The document, which was not an easy one to understand, would be still less easy to explain; and there was a danger that, if the



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Rajah did fully grasp its significance, he would refuse to sign it. But both Damayanti and the Wazir were anxious that he should, for, unlike the Rajah, they held it to be more important that the peasants should retain sufficient grain for next spring's sowing than that the hoard of gold in the Palace vaults should receive yet another increase.

Her pride flattered by the airy disingenuousness of the Wazir's concluding words, she contented herself with an amused glance by way of reply. This glance the Wazir's eyes evaded. He had abruptly put away his business manner and was now bowing and gesticulating, his portly body swaying from side to side, while a stream of compliments flowed from his lips. But Damayanti's smile deepened, and, cutting short his flowery speeches, she hurried out of the hall to run down the long passage that led to the Rajah's room.

She was thinking: 'I must go in and see father for the sake of appearances. But I'm not going to tackle him about this document now. If I did, I should miss my bathe.'

In the ante-chamber she was met by the Rajah's chief attendant who informed her that His Highness was in his bath. A look of resignation came into her face; she sighed and replied that she would wait.

As soon as the man had left the room, she went up to the window and thrust the Wazir's document into a loop of the curtain, which made a convenient pocket. As she did so her hand encountered another piece of parchment; and it was with an expression of dismay that she drew out of its hiding-place a State-paper that had mysteriously vanished no less than three weeks ago. 'I shall have to slip this on to father's table when he isn't looking,' she decided thoughtfully, and concealed the document in a fold of her sari. But the discovery had troubled her.

A few moments later the door of her father's room opened, and the Rajah, clad in a monkish robe of yellow Chinese silk, appeared in the doorway. For a minute he stood looking at her with an air of calculating irresolution which was not uncommon to him. Then, lifting a small, thin hand, he beckoned: 'Come in, my dear; come in!' His voice was peevish, and as soon as she had entered he closed the door carefully behind her, as if she was not to be trusted to do it herself.

A servant was folding some clothes at the farther end of the room. He frowned at the man with distaste and moved quickly away in

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the opposite direction towards a large open window before which there stood a low table covered with papers. He had the same quick, light movements as Damayanti. Indeed, father and daughter were in many respects much alike. They both had the same slender build, with small bones and delicate attachments, the whole body from top to toe presenting an appearance of grace and finish. But the Rajah, who was a man of fifty, had already begun to look worn and frail. His close-cropped hair was grey, and his smoothly-shaven cheeks had an unhealthy pallor. Beneath his thin, pointed nose he wore a moustache with tapering ends which he twisted nervously when speaking. •

‘I sent for you, my dear, because . . .’ He broke off, exasperated by the approach of another servant, who was intending to arrange his cushions before he sat down. ‘No, no! Go away!’ he muttered. ‘Go away, all of you.’ And his eyes followed the man with an expression of actual dislike.

The Rajah’s bedroom was very large, very airy, and decorated in cool, pale tints. Flowers stood about everywhere; in the corners were big branches of white lilac, every table had its bowl of roses, but the Rajah loved best of all his wild flowers, many baskets of which were sent down to the Palace every day from the uplands of Kashmir. Half-way down the room, in an alcove was his bed — a large bed hung with heavy, white silk curtains. Scattered about were books, musical instruments, and architectural drawings, the work of his own hand.

As soon as her father had seated himself Damayanti dropped down on the divan beside him, rested an arm on his shoulder, and ran her eyes rapidly over the papers on the table. ‘I don’t see anything new,’ she said. ‘And I am so longing for my bathe! Can’t you let me go, father darling?’

The Rajah frowned and began pushing the papers about. ‘I’m worried by the disappearance of that report of Mirza Khan’s. Are you sure I didn’t give it to you?’

Damayanti was silent.

The Rajah sighed and looked out of the window with eyes that had suddenly become sad. ‘I’m getting old. That’s the trouble. I lose everything nowadays.’

‘No, you don’t,’ replied Damayanti with decision and, pulling the report out from under her dress, she put it on to the table before him. ‘Darling, it was I who lost it. I’m sorry.’

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The Rajah drew away, turned, and looked at her. For a moment it seemed likely that he was going to storm and scold. Then something checked him. 'You're becoming more careless every day,' he said quietly. 'But never mind. I shan't have you with me much longer. When you are married to Akbar . . .'

'I shall still spend half my time here — with you.'

He shrugged. 'Who knows? Such promises aren't often kept. I sent for you because I have just had a message from Akbar's envoy. That tiresome young man now says he will be arriving in three or four hours' time. Just in the heat of the day.'

'What young man?'

'You know quite well who I'm referring to.'

'I mean: Who is he? What is his name?'

'Prince Mohan. I've told you that a dozen times already.'

Damayanti laughed and again rested her arm on her father's shoulder. 'Darling, I had forgotten. And what does it matter if he does arrive earlier? You needn't see him till the evening — nor need I. This is a private, unofficial visit. Let him be shown quietly into the guest-house. He will be only too glad to have a few hours to himself before beginning to make pretty speeches.'

This was such good sense that the Rajah was annoyed. It always annoyed him to see his grievances and difficulties easily smoothed out.

'That's all very well,' he muttered. 'But . . .'

'But what, darling?'

The Rajah stared straight before him, and then, being a man of intelligence, told the truth. 'It's your marriage. . . I can't get reconciled to it. I don't like the arrival of this young man. I don't want to part with you.'

On his face there was an expression of deep sadness which, although assumed, did none the less bear witness to the truth. And Damayanti knew her father well enough to understand this. And he knew her well enough to be certain that she would understand it. For a few moments they were both silent. Then they looked at one another and smiled.

'Father,' said Damayanti, 'listen! We must both be reasonable about this. You know I don't care about marrying Akbar. You know I'm only doing it because you thought it was the right thing to do. But, having made up our minds, we must go through with it. Only please, please do stipulate that I may come back here whenever

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I want to. Even if you have to give way on some other points, on that you must be firm.'

With these words, she got up. 'Mayn't I go and have my bathe now? Sushi and Mayura are down there waiting for me.'

'Yes, yes! Go!' The Rajah waved his hand peevishly. 'And on your way tell Hakim that I refuse to see Prince Mohan until the evening. It's bad enough to think that our evening will be spoilt.'

Damayanti on her way to the door threw a tender, confidential look over her shoulder. 'Perhaps we shall manage to get rid of him quite early. We might even — after he has gone — have a little music, all by ourselves, as usual.'

The bathing-pool was formed by a small, natural bay in the lake-shore. Tall ilex-trees overhung it, giving to the shaded water beneath them a deep green colour, so that the small stones and sand at the bottom looked green too. Damayanti liked to swim along beneath the surface with her eyes open. She had become quite familiar with that underwater world — its miniature meadows and forests and the flocks of tiny fishes that fled as her shadow passed over them.

When she got down to the bathing-pool it was to find that Sushi and Mayura had had their bathe and gone. For a few moments she was bitterly disappointed, then suddenly her mood changed. The silence and emptiness of the place enchanted her, and she was glad to be alone.

Slipping off her clothes, she waded out as gently as she could in order that not a ripple should be made, and lying on her back, gazed up into the ilexes whose branches hid the sky. Then, turning over, she plunged her face beneath the surface to look into that other dim green world below.

After coming out of the pool she lay in the sun for a while, then dressed and made her way along the edge of the lake to the guest-house. This was a Pavilion which had been built for her mother who had died fourteen years ago. Damayanti had only one memory of the Ranee, a very faint one, which was associated with this graceful and rather fantastic wooden structure that hung over the lake. As soon as she came out from under the trees its blue-green dome, spangled with gold and silver, rose before her. 'I wonder if Prince Mohan will like it,' she said to herself. 'If he doesn't, I shall hate him.'

Priding herself on being a good hostess, she intended to make

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sure that everything was as it should be. On the veranda steps old Hakim, the major-domo, came out to meet her. 'Yes, Your Highness, there are flowers in all the rooms, there is hot water for the Prince's bath, there is a light meal. He must not eat too much or he will have no appetite for his dinner. But there is plenty of wine and sherbet and fruit, all well packed in snow. You will find nothing lacking.' After wandering about with Hakim for a few minutes, Damayanti complimented him and let him go. Passing through an inner room, she opened the door to a small circular chamber, the painted walls of which had fascinated her as a child. She remembered being held in her mother's arms to stare and stare in delight at these strange, bright beasts and flowers and trees. But now, although something sweet and far-away always came back to her here, that scent out of the past was so faint that it invariably brought disappointment. The beasts and flowers and trees were not as she remembered them; and the more closely she looked the dimmer the memory would become.

The air of the little room was now musty. She noticed that the window had not been opened, and that there were no flowers here. All at once she felt her eyes filling with tears; but it was not of her mother nor of herself that she was thinking; it was of the passage of time, which seemed in itself so sad. Going into the little room she closed the door behind her, sat down on the divan, and fell into a dream.

Five, or perhaps ten, minutes went by, and she was still sitting on the divan when voices sounded from the front hall. A moment later the speakers entered the next room, and she started from her seat in dismay, for the unfamiliar voices made it plain that Prince Mohan had already arrived. How could she escape without being seen? Her hand went up to her hair, which, although dry by now, was in some disorder. Her dress, too. . . .

She had moved to the middle of the room and was staring this way and that with startled eyes when the door was abruptly thrown open, and there stood her guest before her! Hakim was just behind, and both made a movement of surprise.

It was not until Hakim had stepped forward with a vague explanatory gesture that she called herself sharply back to a consciousness of what to do. While exchanging looks with this young man, she had been unmindful of everything except *him*, his unassuming air, his humorous smile. She could see that he was wondering who she was.

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'Who is this pretty child?' he seemed to be saying to himself. It had certainly not come into his head that she was the Princess, the Emperor's future bride. His grey-blue eyes held a look of tenderness, compassion almost, and she felt no desire to reject it; no! she accepted it, she surrendered to it, he might give her as much as he would. She saw someone here that she liked — liked so well that she had no room in her mind for anything else. It needed Hakim's stepping forward to remind her that this was Prince Mohan; she came back to herself with a little, hidden gasp, and at once summoned all her self-possession to bid her guest welcome.

IN after days, looking back at the talk that followed, Damayanti was only able to recall certain moments; all the rest remained a blur. The instant Hakim left them they had felt, she remembered, completely at their ease again. And almost at once that ease had transformed itself into intimacy. Not that their speech had been intimate, but the sense of intimacy had been there, imparting to everything that was said a warmth and a glow. And although, a little later, self-consciousness had fallen upon them, that, oddly enough, had brought no discomfort at all. It was out of their shared helplessness in fact that something — which neither could look at yet — had come up into the light. Happiness? It was not that, but you could give it that name.

She fled before it. She ran down the Pavilion steps, waved a hand, and was gone. And all the way across the lawn she had in her heart the knowledge that he was there — on the veranda — gazing after her. And what the look in his eyes meant she knew — oh yes, she knew!

To her relief she reached her room without encountering anyone, and was able to sit alone for an hour, undisturbed in her wonder at what had happened. The first thought to intrude was 'I shall have to tell father that I have already met him,' and, although fairly certain that she would manage this without betraying herself, she disliked the necessity for dissimulation. Next, her imagination took her forward to the moment when, standing at her father's side, she would see Mohan advancing towards them. Would he be able entirely to conceal his feelings? Unreasonably she hoped that his agitation would be just a little too much for him. What dress should she wear. How would the evening go off? Would they find an opportunity to exchange a glance — just one single glance to say 'Yes, it is true! It is not all a dream.'

But nothing fell out as she had expected. In the evening as she was getting ready for dinner an urgent summons came from the Rajah, and the moment she entered his room he thrust a letter into her hand — 'My dear, look at this!' It was to say that his younger brother had had a polo accident and was not expected to live.





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plan. 'But what plan could we-possibly have devised?' said Damayanti to herself. 'Our quandary is hopeless. There is no way out of our difficulties.' She was in her bedroom preparing once more for Mohan's official reception by her father, and if this occasion had been full of pitfalls before, it was now a hundred times more redoubtable.

At four o'clock the next morning she was sitting by her father's bedside. The doctor, Hakim, and the servants had withdrawn, leaving her there alone. The Rajah was not seriously ill; she was sure of that. Perhaps, indeed, he was not ill at all. Lying on his back with his eyes shut, he presented an enigmatical figure. Well as she knew him she could never know him well enough. At this moment she was uncertain whether he was not watching her from beneath his apparently closed lids. Oh, how cruel he was! How cruel his love for her had made him!

Leaving her hand motionless upon the bed, she turned away to hide her face. It was white and set; its childish look had gone; it reflected the agony in her heart. The Rajah's room was suffused with a dim, even light that came from heavily-shaded lamps set here and there. Her gaze went straight to the big, open window, beyond which stretched a cool, clear night, luminous with stars. The Pavilion lay under those stars. A whole wide world of freedom lay under those stars. But she was here — caught, imprisoned, without hope of release as long as her father remained alive.

Her mind went back over the evening which had seemed to pass off so well. Mohan's manner had been perfect; he and her father had seemed to get on admirably together; at no moment had anything gone wrong. And yet, when her father had said good-night to her rather earlier than usual, her heart had been stabbed by fear. That fear had clung to her and kept her awake. Was it possible that he had already noticed something, that he had guessed, that he *knew*? When her maid came in and announced that the Rajah had had one of his attacks, she felt sick with a sudden despair. The blow *had* fallen. He *had* guessed. Oh, how could she ever have been fool enough to suppose that he would not? His intuitions were diabolical. And in spite of his love — because of his love — he would be cruel.

Must love be like that? Must it always be bondage? Was there no liberty in love's kingdom? No space? No starry night? She turned

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away from the window to fix her eyes once again upon her father's face. It was pale, drawn, mummy-like. It was the face of an ageing, ailing man.

But this illness of his — what was it? It seemed to be under his control. These attacks always came opportunely, when he wanted to evade something, or to coerce someone — generally herself. Oh, he was clever and ruthless! He would always know how to get the better of her. He would even contrive so to die as to leave her baffled, and chained to his memory by remorse.

In her very bitterness at this moment she could feel the subtle working of pity. For her imagination had divided itself, and it said to her: 'Hasn't something very dreadful happened to him, too? A few hours ago he believed you to be still his. He was sure of you; for your projected marriage to Akbar did nothing to alter that. It wasn't taking you away from him really — not in any way that mattered. But now he is struck down. He has lost you. The one thing he had to fear has taken place. You have been faithless, deserted him. Can you bear to leave him all alone? Can you?'

A shudder ran over Damayanti. Her lips trembled. She longed to fling herself upon the bed, put her arms around the Rajah, and cry out: 'I won't do it! Father, I promise you I won't do it!'

But she did not move. Some force held her back. It held her back, although her joy — and even her belief — in her love for Mohan had deserted her. The figure of her lover had become dim, his love for her had become unreal. Alone the figure of her father remained terribly real and clear. And the same terrible reality was possessed by the bond that held them, a bond that had thickened and toughened like a living liana through all her years from infancy.

This other tie, what was it? What substance could there be in a tie that had sprung up in a moment and was only five days old? Between her and Mohan there was nothing — only a shared dream. A feverish, misleading dream! But one recovered from one's fevers, and she would recover from this.

She looked at her father again, and, believing him to be truly asleep at last, she got up and tiptoed out of the room. The windows of the passage were bright with the first rays of the sun. Already bees were buzzing in the jasmine outside, birds were twittering, another day had begun; and she thought: 'I have renounced happiness!'

In her room it was half-dark, for the shutters were still closed.

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She sat on the foot of her bed for a while, then rose shivering, and went to the window to let in the sunlight. As the shutter swung back she looked down; and on the lawn below stood Mohan. Her eyes met his in a stare of blank amazement, for this seemed to her to be a miracle.

All her weariness dropped away, and all her sadness too. Mohan smiled and beckoned; she gave a little nod, and, without allowing herself time to think, ran downstairs and out through the garden door on to the lawn. Silent they crossed the lawn together and took the path under the trees. But before reaching the lake they sat down. It was a quiet place filled with the smell of the pines; and there for two hours they remained, sometimes talking but more often silent.

When Damayanti went back to the Palace everything had been said and there was a new certainty in her heart. Her inward conflict was not, indeed, resolved, but Mohan had become as real to her as her father.

As soon as the Rajah woke he sent for his confidential servant, from whom he obtained a full report on what had happened during his absence. And to this was added the news that the two lovers had just had another meeting under the pines. What! She had gone straight back to Mohan from his bedside? It was almost incredible. The Rajah leapt from his bed and began pacing the room. He was burning to take violent measures, but Damayanti had always had a will of her own, and it was now several years since he had been able to treat her as a refractory child. The longer he considered the situation the more serious it appeared to him. Neither Mohan nor Damayanti would have behaved as they had except under the influence of overwhelming passion. The issues were too important.

Mohan was not an irresponsible young man — he had seen that at once; and as for his daughter — well, he was not without some idea of what had been passing through her mind as she was sitting beside him in the night. And yet she had gone out to her lover immediately afterwards!

When a little later in the day, he received from Mohan a letter condoling with him over his illness, and asking for an interview at the earliest possible moment, he decided to see his guest at once. He was confident that the young man's infatuation had not rendered him immune from sentiments of self-blame and even dismay.

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Judged by all ordinary standards, his conduct was abominable. He had betrayed a trust. He might well feel that it was his first duty to cut his visit short, hurry back to the Emperor, and make a full confession.

This the Rajah was determined to prevent, for he knew that the consequences would be — from his point of view — disastrous. The truth of the matter was that Damayanti's proposed alliance to Akbar had been largely of his own contriving, Akbar having no very weighty reasons in diplomacy for desiring it, while personal reasons were wholly absent, since he had never yet set eyes on her. Without a doubt, the Rajah reflected, he would be exceedingly angry, but his anger would spring from the affront offered to his dignity, and not from any other source; and it might cause him to renounce the marriage then and there. Mohan would of course bear the brunt of the royal displeasure, but should the young man persist in his intentions and be willing to pay the penalty (probably, a forced abdication), he might well, in the end, make good his resolve. But the Rajah could not contemplate his daughter's making this — or indeed any other love-match — without rage and despair. Her alliance with the Emperor commended itself to him most of all for the reason that her feelings would not be involved.

So now his immediate aim was to prevent Mohan from taking any irrevocable step. It was of the first importance to keep him in the country for the appointed three weeks, during which time a good deal might be done to bring him — and Damayanti — to their senses.

The Rajah received Mohan in his bedroom. From the shadows of his curtained bed he listened in silence while the young man said 'just the things that he was expecting him to say. His large, dark, reproachful eyes rested on Mohan in an unwinking stare, and his reply was brief, dignified, and reasonable. He pointed out the dangers of precipitate action. 'I have the right to demand something of you,' he said, 'and what I demand is delay. By going to Akbar at once you would not be undoing what you have done, but rendering it irremediable. I want you to stay here a little longer. We all have need to take thought.' Mohan felt obliged to agree, and although his mind was troubled, his heart rejoiced.

For Damayanti the days that followed were both happy and unhappy in an extreme degree. The Rajah was gifted with great

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persuasiveness, and he summoned all his resources. Knowing that her love for him and her compassion were already fighting in his cause, he spoke very little of himself, and never in a tone of anger or bitterness. Through the mouths of the Wazir and others whom she respected he appealed to her vanity, her ambition, and last but not least her sense of duty. Young as she was, Damayanti already had a grasp of public affairs, her heart had been touched by the wretchedness of the poor, and under the sympathetic guidance of the Wazir she had been able to do something to improve their lot — a task to which the Rajah brought little enthusiasm. 'Princess!' the Wazir now said to her, 'Here you have helped thousands; as Akbar's favourite Queen you will help hundreds of thousands. A great future lies before you. Will you sacrifice it to a hasty — and perhaps a transitory — desire?'

Then, another day, the Diwan would approach her. 'My dear Princess, if you knew Akbar as I do, your very love for Prince Mohan would force you to renounce your present intentions. If the Prince escapes death he will not escape disgrace. Doesn't he himself admit that Akbar will compel him to abdicate? It is my firm belief that he will be obliged to go into exile as well. Moreover, Akbar's resentment will certainly spill over on to your father. How should he not hold him partially responsible for such a scandal, such a humiliation, such a calamity? You will be bringing ruin not only upon yourself but upon the two persons whom you hold dearest in the world.'

Damayanti spent many nights in sleepless torment. Her conscience and her sense of duty were on her father's side. Had she been less intelligent or more self-opinionated the words of these old counsellors would have taken little effect, but she possessed a power of detached judgment unusual in one so young. Looking at herself through their eyes, she saw her own inexperience and was afraid of it.

Perhaps it was strange that during these days she did not give Mohan a deeper understanding of what was going on in her heart and in her mind. But there were several reasons for this reserve. In the first place, being accustomed to the society of persons much older than herself, she was not in the habit of sharing her innermost counsels with anyone. Secondly, she shrank from burdening Mohan with her own troubles when he already had a heavy load of his own. And, finally, in her lover's company she was too excited to

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think about anything but the happiness that they were sharing. The hours she spent with him were not only joyful but fortifying.

Yes, when she left Mohan's presence she felt strong. She felt that not all the wisdom, and justice, and virtue were on the side of her father and his mouthpieces. Her heart had a conscience that her mind did not understand, and her heart often said to her: 'If you give up Mohan you will despise yourself for the rest of your life. It may be that everything your father says is true; it may even be that Mohan's love for you and your love for him are not exactly what you think; it may be indeed that all passionate love is delusive — a thing of no lasting worth; and yet if you sacrifice it to these doubts you will despise yourself. Make this renunciation and your reward will be the death of your heart. Underneath your self-approval and your pleasure in the commendation of the world, underneath the peace of a bitter conflict ended, underneath the satisfaction you will take in your father's relief and happiness — underneath all this there will be self-contempt. And the regrets that are rooted in such self-contempt, how bitter they are!'

It was to this voice that Damayanti gave heed. The Rajah was eventually obliged to agree that Akbar should be told everything, but he stipulated that one year should pass before the marriage took place.

It was about two months after Mohan's parting visit that the Guru, reading in the shade of his willow, glanced up from his book to see the young man standing at the top of the cliff. For a moment the two remained motionless looking at one another. 'I wonder how long he has been there,' said the Guru to himself. 'And I wonder what he has to tell me.' Then Mohan waved a hand and came down the steps at a run.

'I got back late last night,' he called out. 'So you see, I've lost no time in coming to see you.'

The Guru, who was advancing to meet him, smiled, took his hand, and made him sit down under the tree.

In his gayest and friendliest manner Mohan chatted about his journey. He was looking well, but his face showed signs of fatigue, and there was something artificial in his liveliness.

After a while there came a moment's pause. Then, 'I've got a little surprise up my sleeve,' Mohan said lightly. 'I'm going to marry.'

'Marry!' The Guru leant forward and clasped his hand warmly. 'My son, this is great news! Who is it?'

'Princess Damayanti.'

'Oh!' There was another brief silence, during which the Guru's eyes questioned him. 'But — what has Akbar got to say about that?'

'He has taken it rather well.'

'Has he!' Although this was said in a tone of relief, the Guru continued to fix Mohan inquiringly. 'Really well?'

'Oh yes!' The young man hesitated. 'In fact, he took it so well that I couldn't help suspecting that he had been prepared. And the next day I found out — quite by chance — that he had.'

'Who had prepared him?'

'Damayanti's father. The Rajah, not unnaturally, would prefer Akbar as a son-in-law. So about a week before I left the country he sent a man off to Agra to give Akbar his own version of the affair.'

'I see.'

Mohan gave a laugh. 'I fancy the man said that I was suffering from a touch of the sun, and that Damayanti had felt it necessary

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to humour me; but that His Majesty mustn't worry because everything would come right in the end.'

The Guru smiled, but his voice was grave. 'Yes, I think I understand. But what did Akbar actually say to you?'

'He told me I had gone off my head. He refused to take me seriously, and gave me one year in which to recover.'

For a minute or more the Guru considered this. 'All the same,' he observed at last. 'I expect Akbar saw well enough that you really meant what you said.'

'Well, I hope so.' The young man's tone was careless, and the next moment he was giving a humorous description of the interview. From this he went on to make jokes about the probable effect of his news upon Bhoj, to whom he had not yet said anything, and a little later he got up to go.

The Guru made no attempt to detain him.

Bhoj stood to gain much from the disgrace that threatened his brother, for Akbar had told Mohan that, were he to persist in his present attitude, abdication would be demanded of him. Nevertheless, on first hearing what his brother had done, he was horrified, and joined with the rest of the Court in deploring the scandal. He himself was about to make a marriage that was eminently 'suitable' in every respect. Had Mohan no sense of what was to be expected of a man in his position? 'We,' he said, 'we have certain standards to keep up. We mustn't allow ourselves to do things that will lower our prestige. In these unsettled times the vulgar are only too ready to point their fingers at us.' And he added: 'Among the vulgar, I am afraid I must include Akbar himself.'

The next few months were not very easy ones for Mohan. If he had felt baffled and frustrated before, he now found his difficulties enormously increased. The whole set of Court opinion was against him, and his prospective abdication weakened his authority. He discussed his position with the Guru, but nothing came of it. The Guru had little to say.

Then, too, another and more personal preoccupation began to trouble him and soon took the first place in his mind. Damayanti's letters were changing in tone; they sounded a note of discouragement, uncertainty, and even reproach. It was in vain that he tried to discover the cause. She would not, or could not, tell him.

The day came when the Guru, sitting on his mat under the willow,



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had to listen for two hours on end, while Mohan paced up and down before him, incoherent with bewilderment and distress. 'I can't understand what is the matter,' was his refrain. 'Something seems to be going wrong.' At last, exhausted, he threw himself down and said: 'Now I have told you everything. Can you help me?'

The Guru looked at him straight. 'Yes, I think I can.'

'Well, for God's sake, do!'

'I think that Damayanti is unhappy about her father.'

'Of course she is. I know that.'

'But more unhappy than you realize. The things one feels most deeply are the things one finds it most hard to explain. One expects them to be guessed. Have your letters shown her that you understand her present agony of mind?'

Mohan stared at the Guru with a frown of puzzled astonishment. 'Agony of mind! Her letters contain no hint of it. Isn't our love a happiness to her — as it is to me?'

'Yes. But it isn't all happiness — even to you. Don't you think you may have given the impression of being more care-free, more light-hearted, than you really are?'

Mohan considered this. A less care-free life than his in the Palace at this moment could hardly, he thought, be imagined.

'Have you described your own troubles to her?' the Guru went on. 'Have you told her that you are already preparing to abdicate?'

'No. But . . .'

'Your letters have been cheerful? Loving, no doubt, but cheerful — even gay?'

'Well, naturally I haven't wanted to add to her troubles by harping on my own.'

'If you have neither described your own troubles nor shown that you have a proper appreciation of hers,' replied the Guru mildly, 'she may well be misjudging you.'

'What should she be thinking?'

'That you don't really love her.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Mohan. And then, after a while, he added, 'I am, indeed, a fool!'

The Guru smiled. For a moment he hoped that this might prove to be his opportunity for saying a few of the things that he was longing to say. But, as always before, Mohan broke off. It invariably happened that when they were getting near to the heart of their subject he would either change to a tone of flippancy or break off.

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What he now did was to announce that he would write to Damayanti at once; he would write a letter that would put everything right. With that he sprang to his feet, waved a hand, and was gone.

Mohan's letter did not reach Damayanti until several weeks later, for her father had taken her to Agra. As soon as this plan was announced she saw what the visit was intended to do. Her father's object was to give her a taste of the gaieties and grandeurs that she was proposing to renounce. And he had been clever enough to choose a time when Akbar was in camp outside Agra, so that a meeting might take place or might not, without giving busybodies an occasion, in either case, for comment. At first she put up some resistance. It frightened her to see how skilfully her father had succeeded in keeping himself in the Emperor's good graces; she was afraid at times that his persistence and adroitness would wear her down. But at last she decided that on this point she must give way.

In the course of the last months her memory of Mohan had become a little dim. Her father by his mere daily presence drained it of reality. The Rajah had become almost a part of herself, and the thought of incurring his anger, or of detaching herself from him, set up a current of childish fear in her mind. This fear gave her father an importance which she sometimes confused with the importance of their love for one another. At such times she would be unfair to the love between herself and Mohan, simply because it was not as oppressive and obsessive as the love which bound her to the Rajah.

A few days at Agra were sufficient to disgust and disillusion her. It was not that grandeurs were lacking, or that she was less well received than she had expected, but the atmosphere of the Imperial Court was unpleasant. The men were worldly in a coarse and stupid way; the women disguised their worldliness a little more subtly, but without taking much trouble to conceal the essential hardness of their hearts. The best that could be said of Agra was that it made a fine arena; and, if the fighting was ugly, it tested your mettle all the same. Her spirit rose to the challenge.

Then one evening she overheard two women gossiping together about Mohan, and one of them told the other with a laugh that he had now actually abdicated. A wave of sickness swept over her; hastily she moved away.

In her room a little later she examined the pain that she was

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suffering, and its complexity baffled her. Mohan's action seemed to her to be premature; it awoke in her feelings of devotion and dismay, admiration and anger, courage and fear. For most of the night she lay awake, sometimes with a panic sense of being caught, and sometimes full of tenderness for Mohan and shame for her pusillanimity.

The next day, as she was sitting alone in one of her grand reception rooms, the door opened, and Mohan was announced.

She sat still, staring at him with dark, frightened eyes, unable even to smile. Mohan was smiling, but his smile and easy manner did not take her in. She saw in his gaze a deep anxiety, a diffident appeal.

Clasping her hands, she started up at last and took a few steps forward. 'Mohan! Why are you here? You ought not to be here. It's not safe.'

'Not safe? Oh, nonsense!' And he began to talk about Akbar in a jesting tone, but his blue eyes, usually so serene, were filled with pain, and she knew that he was hardly aware of what he was saying.

They were standing some few feet apart still. Across this distance his eyes were calling her. Suddenly something in her gave way. She ran towards him and was caught up in his arms.

For a minute or two they were speechless, then, wiping her eyes, she gave a little laugh and said: 'Have you abdicated yet?'

'Yes.'

'Why did you do it?'

He lifted his shoulders, slightly embarrassed. 'I think it was time.'

A sigh escaped her. 'Mohan, my darling,' she began, then stopped short.

'I want to get my position with Bhoj cleared up,' he explained. 'As you know, he and I don't agree as to how a State should be run. The sooner he takes over the management of affairs the better it will be for everyone.'

She looked up into his face searchingly. 'You don't ever regret . . .?'

He laughed. 'No.'

'So you love me still?'

'I do.' He made a pause which she found infinitely moving, then added in a low voice, 'And you? It's not too late, you know . . .'

'I love you,' she answered, and she spoke with absolute conviction.

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She was thinking: 'I am the same, and he is the same, and our love is real. Everything else that I may think is weakness and delusion.' She remembered how it had seemed to her at Kishtwar that they must have known one another in a previous incarnation. She felt that again now. Here was a love the truth and importance of which she must never doubt.

Before going away Mohan admitted that his visit to Agra was foolhardy and promised that he would start back to Daulatpur that same evening. The look he gave her as he said good-bye made her repeat her inward vows. He was single-hearted and single-minded; he had a quality which she respected above all others.

DAMAYANTI's visit to Agra ended soon after Mohan's departure, but those last few days were very painful ones. She was obliged to continue the same social life as before — and with even less taste for it — under the eyes of her father, who never ceased watching her. She never entered a room without being conscious that the people in it had been talking about her, and that the talk would be resumed after she had gone. Her father and his friends were, she knew vigorously denying the report that she and Mohan had met, and their motive was odious to her. She had been spared a meeting with Akbar, but now she almost wished that he would send for her; for, if the meeting were to be private, she might have an opportunity of telling him what her sentiments were. She felt it to be a disloyalty on her part not to declare the truth before all the world, but she knew that by so doing she would draw down Akbar's wrath upon her father, herself, and not least upon Mohan. Bitterly did she regret not having refused to come to Agra.

On her return home she summoned the resolution to tell her father quite plainly that his schemes were of no avail; she was pledged to Mohan and resolved to marry him. To her surprise the Rajah seemed to resign himself. From that day all reproaches ceased; he was gentle and kind, concealing his unhappiness instead of parading it. These tactics had the effect of making her far more miserable than before. Her love for her father, now no longer played upon, rose up in its own strength; her conscience, no longer goaded from outside, manufactured its own pain.

At last sheer pity got the better of her; she went to her father and told him she was willing to consider a brief postponement of the marriage. The Rajah gazed at her in complete silence, and after a minute — overwhelmed by the look on his face — she rushed from the room. When they met again no mention was made of what she had said, but the Rajah was a different man. Gaiety had returned to him; and sometimes he would make plans for the future, in which her prospective marriage to Mohan was completely set aside.

The change in her father was reflected by the entire Court. No one said anything directly, but everywhere she met warm,

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flattering smiles and approving eyes. Sometimes she felt as if she had, indeed, made a noble and self-sacrificing decision, but sometimes — chiefly at night — a wave of shame and remorse would sweep over her. Then, after hours of wakeful misery, she would plot and plan. 'They think that this is the first step to surrender, and that my marriage to Mohan is doomed. But they are wrong. Yes! They are wrong.' And with all the vigour of her resourceful intelligence she looked for ways out of her dilemma. But always she had to fall back upon fate. Perhaps Akbar would die. Perhaps her father would die. Perhaps she herself would die. With untiring obstinacy she covered the same ground over and over again. But no solution presented itself. She could find nothing, plan nothing, decide nothing — except that there must be a postponement of her marriage. Her next problem was to get Mohan to agree to it.

The year of waiting had now come to an end. Early in the afternoon of a fine autumn day Mohan, accompanied by the Guru, rode into the town of Kishtwar. As before he was escorted to the Pavilion in the Palace grounds; and there he found a note from Damayanti awaiting him. It said that she had intended to be at the Pavilion to meet him, but that at the last moment her father had been taken ill, and this prevented her.

Mohan, bitterly disappointed, went to the little room in which he had seen her for the first time, and threw open the door. In his heart there was the fantastic hope that he would find her there again. But the room was empty. He stood in the doorway, thinking. A year had passed, and how much he had learnt in that year! 'Perhaps,' he said to himself with sadness, 'the really important things in life are learnt only under dire compulsion.'

He was still standing there when he heard rapid steps behind him and turned to see Damayanti running into the room. She stopped, stared at him for a moment, then hid her face with her hands. He went up to her, and they clung together, until at last, smiling through her tears, she said: 'I found I couldn't keep away.' And then, standing back and looking intently into his face, she asked: 'Were you, as I came in . . . were you thinking of last year, and remembering?'

'Yes. I was remembering.'

'You were looking sad.'

'I was feeling sad.'

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‘Mohan — why?’

He was silent, then he said: ‘But I am not sad any longer.’

An expression of pain passed over her face, and he noticed it. After a moment she murmured: ‘Have you been feeling sad for long?’

Taking courage, he said quietly: ‘Your letters have been troubling me. I have been feeling anxious for these last two months.’

‘But what did I say to trouble you?’

He looked away. ‘I don’t know. I felt that you were not telling me everything.’

There was a pause. Damayanti bit her lip. At last she said: ‘It has not been easy for me here. But — don’t let’s talk about that. — Mohan! I love you.’

She came up to him again and laid her head on his breast. He put his arms round her, but there was still a frown of anxiety on his face as he said: ‘My darling, has your father *really* been ill during these last two months. And is he *really* ill now?’

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘So far as I can tell.’

A slight hardness had crept into her voice, but in a minute she gave a sigh and said: ‘I must go back to him. But I can’t bear to leave you.’

Mohan echoed her sigh, and at that moment the Guru’s voice was audible in the hall.

‘Who’s that?’ she asked.

‘The Guru. I have brought him with me. You don’t mind?’

‘Of course I don’t mind. I know he is your greatest friend. — But . . . why did you bring him?’

‘It occurred to me at the last minute that he — he might be a help to us both.’

She gave him a long, deep look, and said nothing. They were moving slowly towards the door, when all at once she stopped. ‘Listen, Mohan!’ Her voice was low and urgent, and she began to give him hints for his meeting with her father, the Wazir and others. Her hints were useful, but Mohan felt chilled. He longed for the time when he and she would be free of such preoccupations.

They went into the hall, which was empty. ‘Come in and see the Guru!’ he said, moving to the door on the other side.

But she hung back. ‘Oh, Mohan, I’m feeling nervous.’

‘Nervous? Nonsense!’ And he threw open the door, crying out: ‘Guru, here is Damayanti!’

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The Guru, who was standing by the window, turned and came slowly towards them. He was not the kind of man she had expected to see, for, although Mohan had written a great deal about him, he had never described his appearance. She had pictured him as a large, imposing personage with a flowing white beard. This small, lean man, of so unassuming an air, did not look like a person of wide repute. You wouldn't have thought him capable of attracting attention to himself outside his own village.

After giving him the greeting due to a holy man, she looked into his face with frank curiosity, and during the next few minutes, while they talked, she received the impression that she was being liked. On glancing round at Mohan, she saw a smile on his face, which said: 'Of course you two will get on well together. I always knew you would.'

A few minutes later, when he was by himself again, the Guru went back to the window and stared thoughtfully out over the blue lake. Across it in the distance a range of snowy peaks shone in the slanting rays of the now sinking sun. It was a beautiful scene, but he gazed at it with unseeing eyes. 'She is much less mature than I thought,' he said to himself. 'Her letters show only one side of her. — Poor child!' And he sighed.

Soon after this a message arrived from the Rajah. He announced that he would be well enough to entertain his guests at dinner that evening — but only very quietly.

A couple of hours later Mohan and the Guru were shown into a small room adjoining the Rajah's bedroom, and when his host came in Mohan was startled by the change in his appearance. He was leaning heavily on the arm of an attendant; his face was pinched and bloodless; he had the vague, wandering gaze of a very old man. His greetings were friendly and dignified, but he gave the impression of being preoccupied, and very soon after dinner he pleaded fatigue and withdrew.

One of his ministers, Mirza Khan Shah, who had made the fourth at dinner, now led the way to a room downstairs where Damayanti and a small company of notables were gathered. In the course of the evening it became clear to the Guru that before long several of these gentlemen would be seeking him out for private conversation; and he could guess what they would have to say. A plan of action had been laid down; the Rajah's hand was to be felt in each smallest particular.



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The next week went by with smoothness. Mohan and Damayanti were given plenty of time alone together, and in the meanwhile the Rajah's ministers were making discreet overtures to the Guru. During these days the latter was also given the opportunity to watch Damayanti and her father together, and to observe for himself how close was the tie that bound them. Nor was this all. He was allowed to see how largely the Rajah had delegated his duties, how considerable a part his daughter played in the administration of the State.

Then, one afternoon, he found himself sitting alone with the Rajah on the terrace of the Palace. The circumstances which had brought them together without anyone's being within earshot appeared to be wholly accidental, but all at once he became aware that an important moment had arrived. The Rajah was talking about a project of his to build a summer-house for Damayanti on the other side of the lake; suddenly he broke off, sighed, and fell silent.

After a moment the Guru attempted to start another topic, but it was no good. 'My friend,' the Rajah interrupted, 'why should we keep up any more pretences together? You know what is in my mind. Let us both be frank!' And with that he rehearsed briefly the many good arguments against the prospective marriage — arguments which had already been placed before the Guru by the most influential personages in the State. But he had one thing to say that was new. 'I have it,' he said, 'from Akbar's own lips that if Prince Mohan will listen to reason, he, on his side, will not be unwilling to reinstate him in his former position as Ruler of Daulatpur.'

The Guru, who had been listening in a silence, which, visibly, was distressful and unresponsive, made no immediate reply, and, when at last he did speak, it was with downcast eyes. 'Maharajah,' he murmured, 'I cannot but admit the truth of what you say. The considerations you put forward are weighty indeed! But . . .'

'But what?' snapped the other with a touch of impatience.

The Guru lifted his eyes. 'In the course of this year I have become certain that Prince Mohan does truly love the Princess; and in the last fortnight I have seen clearly that she loves him. I think it would be a calamity for them both, if the marriage were not to take place.'

'It will surely be a calamity for them both if it does.'

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‘Outwardly, yes — perhaps.’

‘Are you not being — sentimental?’

‘Maharajah, I am speaking of the things of the spirit.’

‘You are speaking of two young persons who are inexperienced and headstrong.’ He broke off. ‘But I am not going to argue. I want to meet you on your own ground. I am going to convince you that the love between my daughter and Mohan is not going to make them able to live happily together. It is a question of temperament.’ And he proceeded to explain himself with no lack of insight or worldly wisdom.

When he had finished the Guru again lifted his eyes to him gravely. ‘Maharajah, it may be that most of what you foresee will come to pass. But, even so, each will be learning from the other what no one else could teach.’

The Rajah stared, then frowned, and finally said: ‘Possibly, but a human being has duties to others besides himself. My daughter has duties and responsibilities here that cannot be ignored.’ And again he developed his case. But not to any great length, for he was quick to see that he was making no headway. Whereupon he sighed and fell silent.

There was a long pause during which he gazed out over the lawn with eyes in which there was profound weariness, profound melancholy. He seemed to sink into hopelessness, to shrivel, and to grow old. At last, however, making a little gesture of resignation, he turned to the Guru with a faint, slightly humorous, and wholly pathetic smile. ‘My friend,’ he said quietly, ‘I am an old man and my health is not too good. My life, in short, is drawing rapidly to its close. If Damayanti leaves me now, it will go hard with me. My last word to you, then, is this: Do, at the very least, persuade Prince Mohan to let her wait.’

Having spoken, he bowed his head. And now there came a spell of silence, which, with each passing second, became more painful — for in it the Rajah’s appeal continued to reverberate. And yet the Guru neither stirred nor spoke.

Abruptly the Rajah tossed his fan aside and rose to his feet. His movements now had all the alertness of a stripling’s; it was with brisk step and upright carriage that he walked back into the Palace.

AFTER a moment the Guru gave a sigh and moved slowly in the direction of the Pavilion. But instead of going in he passed by and went down to the lake. For a long time he stared out over the water, watching the flush of sunset fade from the snow-mountains in distant Kashmir.

Later, passing through the hall, he glanced through the open door into Mohan's room. For a moment he thought no one was there, then he descried a figure on the divan in the corner. It was too dark to see anything clearly, but he felt sure it could be no other than Mohan, and he paused, perplexed by the young man's stillness.

Mohan's voice sounded at last, but it was muffled and dull. 'Come in!' he said, and added: 'Please shut the door.'

The Guru closed the door behind him and waited. Then, as nothing further came from Mohan, he broke the silence himself. 'I have just been having a painful talk with the Rajah. He wanted me to urge you to agree to a postponement of your marriage. I answered that I could not.'

Mohan said in a strangled voice. 'Damayanti has been asking me the same thing.'

The Guru raised his hand and let it fall again with a sigh.

After a minute Mohan gave a short laugh. 'All this had already been prepared.' He paused, drew a deep breath, and then went on: 'Another postponement! No!'

'No!' repeated the Guru quietly; and then, still standing there, he let his head drop and cupped his chin in his hand.

'My son,' he said at last, 'I have a question to ask. Haven't you, deep down in your heart, been fearing something like this for quite a long time? Haven't you been expecting to meet with difficulties here? I, certainly, was expecting them. And my misgivings were confirmed on that first day when you brought Damayanti in to see me. Behind her happiness at your return I could see fear and dread.'

'I was expecting difficulties — yes. But not from her.'

'Don't be harsh! Think what pressure has been brought to bear on her during all these months! There was no one here to help.

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And she has had too much time for thought — solitary thought, which often gets one out of touch with one's own heart. The head works by itself and doesn't dare to listen. You must be careful and patient.'

Mohan said abruptly: 'You speak as if you were quite sure that we should do well to marry.'

'I couldn't be quite sure before seeing Damayanti. But now I am quite sure.'

Mohan looked up. Then he said: 'Well now *I* am not quite sure.'

The Guru shook his head. 'Your pride is up in arms against her. But she is just as unhappy as you are.'

These words were followed by a silence, then the Guru went on: 'When she asked you to postpone the marriage, what did you answer?'

'I got very angry. I refused. But I added that if she wanted to break off completely . . .'

'And she?'

'She said nothing.'

'Nothing?'

'No. I gave her no chance. I lost my temper.'

'And did she still say nothing?'

'No. She was crying. And then I left her.'

Again there was a silence. The Guru approached and laid a hand on Mohan's arm. 'I don't think any great harm has been done.'

The young man turned his face up to peer at the Guru through the obscurity. He was obviously puzzled, and some question was framing itself upon his lips when the door opened and a servant stood hesitating on the threshold.

'Yes?' said Mohan impatiently.

'I have a note for Your Highness.'

'Bring it, and bring a light.'

As soon as he had read the note Mohan waved the servant away and turned to the Guru. 'It's from Damayanti. She wants me to come to her.'

The Guru nodded and smiled. 'Go — and may heaven bless you!'

As soon as he appeared, Damayanti flung herself into his arms, with protestations of love and contrition; and Mohan was utterly amazed. He had denounced and upbraided her with a violence

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which had since seemed to him, if not wholly inexcusable, at any rate uncontrolled and cruel. Yet here she was, reproaching not him but herself!

At first he was speechless with delight, then he began to defend her from herself, and finally he fell to accusing himself, on his side, of selfishness, lack of imagination, and — worst of all! — an odious tendency to mistrust. Damayanti was soon smiling through her tears; but now and again she shook her head sadly, and after a while, having regained her composure, she made him sit beside her, put her hand on his, and said: 'I want to tell you — everything.'

This was the opening to a long, difficult, unhappy exposition of all that had been on her mind during the last few months. She spoke clearly and well. Mohan saw that she wanted to keep nothing concealed; it was only when she had to talk of her father that she hesitated, leaving her sentences unfinished. As Mohan listened he understood. What he had seen of her life during the last week lent weight to her words. The situation, as it appeared from her point of view, stood before him in painfully clear outline. What right had he to demand such great sacrifices not only of her, but of her father and of the whole of this little world? Looking with unhappy humility at himself and at the life he had to offer her, it seemed to him that he had been blind. With him a narrowed existence, smaller interests, shrunken opportunities awaited her.

On her side, Damayanti, as she spoke, was fortified — and as not infrequently happened with her, a little carried away by her own eloquence. But when she noticed the sadness that was settling down on Mohan, she again felt a prick of self-contempt. Her own case seemed to her somehow paltry; and something in her presentation of it sounded not quite true. Before she had finished all she meant to say she broke off.

There was a long and dreary pause, at the end of which Mohan, speaking in a lifeless voice, agreed to a further six months' postponement of the marriage. It was as much as Damayanti could do not to start up, fling her arms about him and cry: 'No, no! I can't, I won't, I don't ask this of you.' But in those torturing moments she remembered her words to her father, and the joy with which they had been received. So she bit her lip and turned her face away; and it was in a voice as lifeless as Mohan's that she said: 'Forgive me! And don't lose faith in me! I will never ask for anything like this again.'

On that they parted, but Damayanti was far from finding the

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relief which she had thought to find. She had won her point — that was true; she had obtained six months' respite — six months in which to bring her father round, if not to an unprotesting acceptance of her marriage, at any rate to a state of resignation. No doubt she had been weak in the past, but she would be weak no more. She would force her father to realize that he could not wear her down.

She had won her point, but less than half an hour after Mohan's departure, she was not thinking about that at all. She was thinking about Mohan, about what was going on in his mind. Minute by minute she realized more fully what he must be feeling. It was as if ghostly messengers from the Pavilion were arriving and whispering in her ear. The workings of his humility and his pride — she felt them as it were in her own heart. She understood, too, that in accepting a postponement he had been accepting something more. He had made a renunciation; he had resigned himself to the loss of her.

This last thought, which kept her awake in the night, finally induced such pangs of pity, love, and self-reproach that she sprang out of bed in a blind impulse to run to the Pavilion then and there. Next, walking up and down her room, she struggled to regain self-control. 'I must think!' she told herself. 'My task is to restore Mohan's faith in me. Somehow it must be done.' But how? She could not go back upon her word to her father by calling for an immediate marriage, nor could she allow Mohan to go away with the feeling that this was the end.

Suddenly she thought of the Guru. She must lay the whole case before him and obtain his help.

Although she had seen very little of the Guru during these days she had received the impression that he was feeling friendly towards her. She believed that she could persuade him. But, she reflected, she must not overshoot her mark and make him feel that it was her duty to stay permanently by her father's side.

Wasn't it, indeed, possible that the Guru and Mohan were arriving at this conclusion even now? What if they were preparing to leave the very next day? When in her imagination she pictured Mohan riding away down the valley in the early morning light — riding away for ever! leaving her here alone for the rest of her life! — her blood froze, panic seized her, and for some minutes she was bereft of all power of thought.

Then bewilderment crept over her. 'Do I understand myself

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at all?' she wondered. 'Am I not perhaps quite a different kind of person from what I believe?' She was remembering how during the last twelvemonth she had often imagined a profoundly moving scene in which she had persuaded Mohan that it was their duty to separate for ever. The deep and noble sorrow of that imagined parting, how little reality it had, compared to the icy terror that gripped her now!

It was early morning, the dew still fresh upon the grass, when she made her way to the Pavilion. The Guru was expecting her, for she had sent a note in advance. He came quickly towards her as she entered the room, and, after one look at her face, held out both his hands. Tears came into her eyes, but she controlled herself and followed him to the divan, where they sat down.

It was her intention to say little at first — no more than was necessary to find out what he thought. But in his actual presence she felt herself enveloped in such a large, compassionate friendliness that all her preparations went out of her head. Unexpectedly she heard herself saying: 'Oh, Guru! What do you think I ought to do?'

He smiled a little. 'If you love Mohan, marry him.'

'At once? Does he insist that it shall be at once?'

The Guru hesitated.

She said quickly: 'He has spoken to you since our last meeting, hasn't he?'

'Yes.'

A kind of sob broke from her. 'I think I know what he said. He told you he had agreed to a postponement — but that he felt it was the end — the end of everything.'

The Guru nodded.

'And what did you say?'

'I had no time to say anything. He was only with me for two minutes.'

She drew a long, tremulous breath. 'Oh Guru . . .! What am I to do?'

'I think you ought to talk things over with him — in order to find out what you both really want.'

'Mayn't I talk with you first?'

'Yes, indeed you may!'

She considered, and he broke the silence by saying: 'My child, may we begin by my asking you one or two questions? — Well, first

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of all, do you really feel sure that at the end of six months your father would part with you more easily?"

'Yes.'

'I can't feel sure about that myself; but let us leave it for the moment. Do you feel sure, in any case, that *you* would feel it easier to leave *him*?"

'Yes, because I should have done everything I could.'

'Again, I can't feel sure that you are not mistaken. But let us leave that, too. I want to ask you one other question — one only. If Mohan were to insist that the marriage must be now or never, what would you do?"

'I don't know.'

The Guru gave her a gentle smile. 'You can trust me, my child.'

Faintly colouring, Damayanti said: 'I think I might give in. I don't believe it would be right; but I probably should.'

'If you did,' returned the Guru with decision, 'it would certainly lead to great unhappiness for you both. You ought not to marry Mohan now — or ever — for any other reason except that you want to. Otherwise, in your heart, if not with your tongue, you would be constantly reproaching him with having caused you to do something you didn't want to do. Those who do what they don't want to generally make others suffer for it in the long run, and, anyhow, they always feel very superior.'

'But in this case I should be feeling that I had done wrong.'

'Nevertheless, as regards Mohan, you would be feeling superior. You would have been giving in to him rather as an over-indulgent mother gives in to a spoilt child. Whenever pity for your fathee rose up in your heart you would feel a corresponding dislike or contempt for Mohan. And even should you succeed in converting this into self-blame, things would be no better. Moreover, Mohan would see what was passing in your heart, and it would pain and anger him. He would rightly feel that he had put himself into a position of moral inferiority. No, no! You must never marry Mohan unless, all things taken into account, that is what you, on your own responsibility, and for your own sake, want and choose to do.'

'And if,' said Damayanti after a silence, 'if I give up Mohan?"

'If you were to do it just because your father wanted you to, you would be making the same kind of mistake and your father's selfishness would stand between you and him perpetually. Some part of



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him would be uneasily conscious all the time that he had used your love for him to spoil your life. And you would have acted wrongly, too, for it is nearly always wrong to treat another as an inferior sort of person to oneself.'

Damayanti stiffened a little, and now she said: 'But people differ in temperament and — and outlook. My father has a right to his own point of view.'

'Not if it is a wrong one. And if there is no way of deciding whether one outlook is better than another, why have you come to me for advice?'

Damayanti was silent.

'My child, have you never heard the saying: "The holy man and we are one in kind"? That saying expresses the right view of human nature. It implies: first, that there is but one moral law, and secondly, that that moral law applies to all. This is very important. For it means that it is not true that there is a superior kind of person to whom one standard applies, and another kind of person to whom another standard applies. You would not only be wanting in respect for your father, but acting on a wrong view of humanity altogether, if you were not to apply to him the same high standard that you apply to yourself.'

Damayanti was looking at the Guru fixedly, and her expression showed her to be unconvinced. After a silence she said: 'Well! but, in any case, Guru, what do you want me to *do*?'

'I don't think that you should do anything by yourself — I mean on your own judgment — because you won't be able to form a right judgment without consulting the others concerned. I think that you should consult with Mohan and your father on terms of perfect equality and frankness.'

'But, Guru, I have already done that.'

'On terms of perfect equality and frankness?'

Damayanti hesitated and then kept silence. Her expression showed her to be seeking some other avenue of approach. At last she said: 'So far we have been talking as if I and my father and Mohan were alone in the world. But we are not. We all have duties to other people as well.'

The Guru nodded. 'That's true. But I believe that personal matters come first. Or rather, in making one's personal life satisfactory, one automatically makes one's public life satisfactory too. The bad condition of the world as a whole is, I think, largely due to

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the fact that nearly every highly-placed person in it defends what is morally wrong in his own particular way of living on the grounds that somehow or other those particular conditions contribute to the public good. But I am convinced that no real or lasting good is being done to mankind by the people who argue like that. By maintaining themselves in positions in which they are bound to become more and more selfish and self-deceiving, they are doing direct harm to themselves, and indirect harm to everybody. Now this sounds like an attack on your father and you,' the Guru went on, leaning forward and smiling into his listener's face, 'but don't be angry with me, please! I assure you I don't wish to imply that your father is a bad ruler — as rulers go.'

His voice was so humorous and friendly that Damayanti could not but respond with a smile. 'I don't quite understand,' she said, 'but I want to. What do you find wrong with the conditions in which my father and I . . . ?'

The entrance of a messenger from the Palace interrupted her. He handed her a note and retired.

'This is from my father,' she said, looking up with a troubled face. 'He wants to see me at once.'

After a moment's silence they both rose. The Guru accompanied her down the Pavilion steps, at the bottom of which she stopped, and, rousing herself from her preoccupation, said: 'May I come and see you again this afternoon?'

'Please do!' he answered.

WITH the Rajah's short, peremptory note clutched tight in her hand, Damayanti moved slowly in the direction of the Palace. She felt sure that her father had been told exactly at what hour she had gone to the Pavilion, and it was probable that he also knew that her long conversation had been with the Guru.

The interview was about as painful as she had expected, and when, an hour later, she emerged from his room, she felt completely exhausted. Her father had begun with upbraidings and menaces, but these had soon weakened into complaints, and in the end he had fallen into the silence of helpless grief. As usual, she said to herself bitterly, he succeeded in working upon her not through one emotion but through many. Fear, the unreasoning, anxious fear that one inherits from one's childhood's days, was able to blend itself most strangely with pity and love. But many other feelings entered as well, to produce a huge complex agitation that caused her heart to thump against her ribs and her reason to refuse service.

She began to dread the resumption of her conversation with the Guru, for while, during the night, she had imagined herself painting her relations with her father as wholly beautiful, she now perceived that this would not be honest. But she clung to it that the love between them *was* beautiful in spite of its blemishes. 'I don't believe,' she said to herself, 'that love can be truly love, if it isn't like ours. Human beings are made like that; and everything else is pure theory.' Remembering what the Guru had said, she feared that he would be too academic, too remote from reality, to be of much use to her. He was intuitive certainly, and kind; but she shrank none the less from talking to him about her father.

It was, accordingly, with a mind full of doubts that she returned to the Pavilion. As soon as she had sat down the Guru said: 'Mohan came in for a few moments this morning after you had gone. He asked no questions and said very little, but I could see that his attitude had not changed.'

On hearing these words her heart sank. 'I shall need all the help the Guru can give me,' she thought. There was deep anxiety in her eyes as she asked: 'Is he feeling very angry with me?'

'Not exactly angry.'

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‘And — do you, too, think he has reason to be?’

The Guru gave her a smile. ‘May I talk to you about yourself for a little?’ And when Damayanti had answered with a quick nod, he went on: ‘Mohan, as you know, is very reserved, but during the last year he has spoken about you a good deal, and even showed me certain parts of your letters. I was astonished by the maturity they revealed. What, I asked myself, could this young woman’s upbringing have been to make her so self-reliant, so prematurely ready to assume the direction of affairs, so full of foresight, so practised in self-control? As soon as I arrived here I got my answer, and it was the answer I had expected; but I continued to marvel, for your situation here is even more unusual than I had imagined, and you, too, are different from the picture I had formed of you.’

‘How am I different?’ asked Damayanti, interested.

The Guru laughed. ‘You are much less grown-up than your letters suggest. A part of you remains remarkably childlike.’

‘Oh!’

‘And the situation here is more extreme than I realized. Day by day my respect for your character has gone up by leaps and bounds.’ He paused, and there was now a kindly malice in his smile. ‘How have you managed to remain so unspoilt?’

Damayanti stared, gave a little laugh, and said quickly: ‘What do you mean? In what way?’

Still smiling, the Guru shook his head. ‘I think you know what I mean. Why, when you drive out into the country, the peasants rush towards you from all over the fields to kiss your hands! Wherever you go blessings are called upon your head! On your return to the Palace the ministers crowd round you with flattering requests for your assistance, your advice! And then, your father! Every day you have the insidious pleasure of seeing the Rajah, a man of great intelligence and charm, turning himself into a child before you!’

‘Oh, now you *are* exaggerating.’ And Damayanti drew herself up. ‘You are being unjust.’

‘Am I? Are you sure?’

And then, as she made no reply, he went on: ‘I can’t help feeling that the situation here in Kishtwar is a bad one — bad for your father, and for you, and, in the long run, for everybody. And what, I ask myself, would now become of you, if Mohan were to go out of your life? You would certainly demand more and more flattery and power. How else could you compensate yourself for your renuncia-

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tion? In order to render your existence endurable, in order to stifle your inward self-contempt, you would need every false support that you could find. You know as well as I do what a temptation it is to a woman in your position to idealize herself and her role. How could you fail to carry a flattering picture of yourself constantly before your eyes? Your tactfulness and sweetness with an exacting father, your grace and graciousness as a Princess, your grasp and intelligence in dealing with public affairs, your liberal-mindedness — you would soon come to live simply for the sake of displaying these. And, in the meantime, what of your inner life? What of your private dealings with yourself? My child, I don't think that you could stop your inner life from becoming an endless series of repressed irritations, feigned amiabilities, calculated generosities, and forced enthusiasms. You are not naturally given to self-deception and deep down in your heart you would know yourself to be a little, hollow shell of make-believe.'

Damayanti listened to this with a set face. 'You speak of my using patience and tactfulness in dealing with my father,' she said drily. 'But if I do, it is because I love him. The fact that we love one another hardly seems to weigh with you at all'

'Then I have given a false impression,' returned the Guru. 'The truth is —' and he hesitated — 'the truth is that I have shrunk from talking about that. But may I?'

Damayanti nodded.

'What I have learnt since coming here is this: your mother, who died eight years ago, was a very gentle lady, very submissive to your father, and an invalid for most of her life. Never was it possible for your father to make any demands on her. Her frailty kept her in a world apart. At that time he was an energetic and painstaking ruler. He had good health, an active mind, and social gifts which he enjoyed exercising. When your mother died he concentrated his affections on you, and was able to establish a relationship of the kind that his weaker nature craved. I mean a relationship in which each party is both dominator and dominated. Since then he has gradually turned himself into your child, your spoilt child. He has neglected his public duties, for it has flattered his indolence and his pride in you to see you discharging them for him. He has neglected his friends; for his relation with you has been much easier and more insidiously pleasureable. And, lastly, he has resorted to invalidism to bind you still more closely to him.'

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'Oh, you are cruel! You are inhuman!' cried Damayanti. 'There is another side to all this. You are being quite unfair.'

'I don't feel inhuman, and I don't want to be unfair.' The Guru's tone was earnest. 'Please try not to be angry with me.'

'Guru!' returned Damayanti with vigour, 'this is not a thing that one can argue about. Admitting that what you say about my father is true, that won't stop us from continuing to love one another. Indeed, if true, it would make me pity him all the more.'

The Guru looked at her for a full minute in silence. Then he sighed and said: 'I don't want you to love him less, or him you. I say it would be a good thing if you each loved the other more; for then you would each seek the other's happiness.'

'But he does seek my happiness.'

'He wants you to be happy — of course. But is he willing to *seek* your happiness — that is to say, to help you to live a life in which it will be possible for you to be happy?'

'He thinks it is possible for me to be happy as we now are. And perhaps he is right.'

'No, he is not right. You are growing up, and something has come into your life which will make it impossible for you to go on enjoying the kind of happiness you have made shift with until now. Your father knows this. He approached me on the subject of your marriage yesterday, and it was not necessary for me to speak to him as I am speaking to you. My silences spoke for me.'

-He paused. Damayanti, looking straight before her, made no reply.

'In his heart of hearts,' continued the Guru, 'your father knows. He has known for some time, and he knows better every day that you and he are moving down the wrong road. That is the chief cause of his unhappiness — for he is a profoundly unhappy man.'

For a few moments after the speaking of these words Damayanti remained motionless, then she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

A LITTLE sound of pain and pity came from the Guru; he rose, walked over to the window, and stared across the lake. Then presently, without turning, he said: 'The sun is just setting. I have a longing to go down to the water's edge. Will you come with me?'

Damayanti made no reply.

He came back to the divan and laid a hand on her shoulder. 'My dear child,' he said coaxingly. 'Come with me! We have been sitting here too long.'

After a moment she wiped her eyes and got up. They went out by the veranda door, and walked down on to a small spit of land that ran out into the lake. The sun was sinking into a golden mist; there was no stir in the air, and no ripple on the water; the scene had a beauty that seemed to be full of a deep, but not hopeless, melancholy.

'When Mohan came into my room at midday he said he was going for a sail.' The Guru raised his arm and pointed. 'That must be his boat, I think — the one lying becalmed off the headland.'

Damayanti looked and bit her lip; for a long time her eyes remained fixed upon the boat; then, still silent, she turned her head away.

They went back a little way and sat down under a pine.

'If you will listen to me a few minutes longer,' said the Guru, gently, 'I think you will see that I do understand what you are feeling.'

'I myself hardly know,' she murmured.

'It is natural that something in you should rebel against me.'

Damayanti gave him a long, brooding look. 'I think and feel in two different ways; and I can't bring them together.'

'We all think and feel with two different parts of ourselves. Let me tell you something out of my own experience. The person I have loved most in my life happens to have been my mother's sister, my own mother and father having died when I was very young. She had no children and lavished her love upon me. But she had a hot temper, was jealous, and full of worldly ambition on my behalf. I loved her with all my heart, but often and often between the ages of eight and eighteen, I wished her dead. At times remorse and shame afflicted me — but not seriously, for something told me that

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my wish was the reverse side of something permissible — even good. I am sure you have sometimes wished your father dead.'

'I have.'

'Such wishes are the crude, fumbling, as yet unconstructive, element in the wish to expand, to embrace the future. They pass when the bondage to the past has been broken. — But sometimes, too,' he went on after a pause, 'I had another feeling — one which perhaps you have also had. A certain look, or a few words dropped casually, or a trifling act of kindness and humility on the part of my aunt had (and still has to-day, when I think about it) the power to release a wave of love and pity so overwhelming that my heart is wrung and I say to myself: "In comparison with this nothing else counts." Do you know that feeling?'

Unable to speak, Damayanti gave a little, uncertain laugh.

'That is the human heart!' the Guru continued. 'There is the passion, the force, that is our very life. Often and often it has happened to me that within one hour I have both wished my aunt dead and longed to die for her sake. But when my passion was running free like that I was doing very little to make her happy. And similarly, loving me as she did, my aunt did little to assist me towards happiness. It was only during the last two years of our life together, after I had suddenly realized what I had to do, that our love began to give happiness to us both.'

'How old was she then?'

'No younger than your father.'

The sun had now set. With the falling dusk a light breeze had sprung up, and Damayanti shivered. The breeze filled the sails of the boat on the lake. It began to move. It moved slowly away.

'Incalculable,' said the Guru, 'are the emotions of love and pity and remorse that rise up from the depths and carry one along. There are certain actions of mine — they are all of them rather small and trivial — which, even after the lapse of many years, make me wince whenever I think of them. And, on the other hand, certain actions for which I know I ought to feel a great and enduring remorse affect me not at all. Only by a deliberate effort am I able to feel sorry for having done those things — sorry for the persons I injured. It seems to me very plain that we have two consciences, one strong and unreasonable, the other reasonable, and, unfortunately, rather weak. Besides, it isn't a question of sudden up-rushes of feeling only; one's customary, day-to-day sense of blamelessness or guilt is largely



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governed by a part of oneself that is outside reason or control. For many years I suffered nearly all the time from a most unpleasant sensation in the centre of my body, a feeling which seemed to be half physical and half mental. On the mental side it was a feeling of anxiety, fear, and guilt. And I looked in vain for the cause of this sensation; I could never find one that satisfied my common sense. Now the something in you that rebels against what I am saying is not a small, insignificant part of yourself; it is a large, important part. It built itself up in the very early years of your life. It is invested with all the authority of old-established things and with all the sentiment that clings to them. I am not asking you to despise or ignore that part of yourself. I am only asking you to recognize it for what it is. If you look at it from the outside, and recognize that it is not a Higher Authority to which you *ought* to give a blind obedience, you will be able to order your life in such a way as to make yourself and others happier. What it comes to is this: one's emotions afford one no steady guidance, and their orders are often inconsistent with one another. Just now, for instance, as you were looking at Mohan's sail upon the lake, emotion urged you in one direction; but if you had been looking at your father's sail upon the lake it would have urged you in the opposite direction.'

Here the Guru paused, and Damayanti, her knees drawn up to her chin, continued to stare frowningly over the water. At last she gave a sigh, turned her head, and said: 'Guru, I have not got your convictions. I am obliged to trust to my emotions and instincts; and now, if I do what you think right, it will probably be simply because *you* think it right. And that is not what you want. It is not enough.'

The Guru laughed. 'My dear child, what can I, or anyone else, do but trust to an instinct? Reason can do no more than disentangle one's instincts. And, after all, to use reason for this purpose is itself only an instinct. But it seems to be a wise one.'

'Reason!' Damayanti shook her head. 'It doesn't seem to be of much use to me just now. And my chief instinct is to obey my sense of duty. For a whole year I have been suffering from feelings of guilt and remorse. I have no more self-confidence left. I need rules.'

'I understand that very well. And I will tell you now why I am anxious that you should not give in to those feelings. They arise largely out of your weariness, and they are suspect for other reasons as well. I have noticed that those who lay stress on the ideas of duty and self-sacrifice generally act from motives that are mixed. They

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overlook the agreeable, and magnify the disagreeable, aspects of the course chosen in the name of duty. I am suspicious of duty because it has come to be associated with obedience to rules of conduct which have a social rather than a spiritual sanction. Duty, in other words, often offers an excuse for obeying the letter instead of the spirit of the law. And people often mistake the satisfaction which comes from conforming to public opinion and receiving the world's approval for the satisfaction of real right-doing. Then, too, those who think in terms of duty and admire themselves for performing it, imply that it is always pleasanter and more profitable to do the wrong thing than the right. This seems to me to be taking a childishly mistaken view of the universe — and of human nature. For it would be a poor sort of universe in which one could only act rightly at the cost of one's happiness, and it is a poor sort of character which can only find its pleasure in acting wrongly or in the self-conceit which springs from a grim, self-enforced right-doing. I don't believe that either the universe or human nature is really like that.'

'But who am I to judge between the letter and the spirit? You are asking me for more self-confidence than I have, Guru. Not everyone has your conviction that he knows what is right.'

The Guru smiled, and there was a twinkle of malice in his eyes. 'It seems to me that I am asking you to be a little *less* self-confident. I should like you to be less confident that your way of looking at your problem is the right one, and that all you have to do is to get me, and Mohan, and your father to do what you have already decided, all by yourself, to be best. I should like you to be less confident that you know what is best, or even that you really understand what you want. I would like you to be far less confident that your past way of life here with your father has been a good one. And I should like you to be without any confidence at all in your ability to make it a good one in the future.'

'That seems to me to be going rather far,' said Damayanti. 'Why shouldn't I at least learn to make it a good one?'

'Because it is no use trying to outwit the spiritual laws that govern mankind.'

'I don't think I know what you mean by "spiritual laws".'

'Oh yes, my dear child, you do! You acknowledge them implicitly every hour of the day. Everyone does. For just as in the material world things don't happen anyhow, but follow certain laws, so, too,

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in the world of mind and spirit certain laws manifest themselves, and one feels it. But, while nearly everybody sees plainly enough that it is useless to try to outwit the laws governing matter (although some few, to be sure, attempt to do it by magic), most of us still cherish a primitive notion that we can outwit the laws that rule the human spirit. In principle we concede the truth, but in any particular case we are apt to yield to the idea that by using a little ingenuity we can set spiritual laws at naught. We do this in spite of the compelling force of the words of Buddha, Jesus Christ, and all the great teachers. To say nothing of our own repeatedly renewed experience.'

These words of the Guru's were followed by a long silence.

'Very well!' said Damayanti suddenly. 'I will do what you think right.'

The dusk had now turned into darkness. The Guru leant forward to peer into her face. After a moment he breathed a sigh and laid his hand on hers.

'What am I to say to my father?' she asked in a low voice.

'I think that you should tell him everything — all that has gone on in your mind up to your talk with me, nearly all that I have said to you, and all that you think and feel in consequence of our talk. Your father is a man of great perceptiveness; he won't fail to understand you, although he may say that he does not. What will come as a shock to him is not what you say but the fact that you are saying it. And you will naturally do all you can to mitigate his pain. You will help him most, my dear child, by letting him see your own pain. Let him see all your distress of mind. In that he will see how much you love him.'

'He won't believe me!' And Damayanti suppressed a sob.

'You will not be asking him to believe anything that he doesn't see with his own eyes. Let him pity you.'

'He won't pity me.'

'My child, I don't think you have any right to think so poorly of the Rajah. You have used too much self-control in the past, and your father too little. Put away all pride and let him see you simply as a very loving and unhappy person. Let him have a chance of showing you that he is capable of pity — and more.'

'You are not allowing for his anger.'

'The best dissipator of anger is pity.'

After a pause Damayanti said: 'He will want to argue with me.'

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'Of course he will. And, if he convinces you that he is right and I am wrong, then you must admit it — and take further thought.'

Damayanti made a little movement of impatience. 'You know quite well that he will not convince me. But he will make me feel that I am sacrificing his happiness to my own.'

'Ah! then it is that you will have to summon up all your strength to keep real to yourself the laws of the spirit. Fight down the scepticism, the pessimism, the cynicism, that will attack you in the semblance of pity. Keep clear your knowledge that your father's attitude is wrong, and that because it is wrong, and because you would be doing wrong in yielding to him, unhappiness and deterioration of character must inevitably follow for you both, if you give way. Cling to your faith in human nature! Believe in your father's power to recover himself! Believe in *him*! Never cease showing him that you believe in the spiritual laws, in human nature, and in *him*! And in the end a good relation will spring up between you.'

'Isn't that a rather superior attitude to adopt towards one's father?'

'No. The "superior" attitude is that of treating your father as if he were inferior to yourself.'

Damayanti was silent.

'Forgive me, my child,' the Guru went on, 'if I suggest that part of your difficulty springs from a kind of conceit. Conceit fastens your attention on to your father, while leaving your own character and happiness out of account — and, incidentally, Mohan's as well. Isn't there something rather suspect in this ostensible self-elimination?'

'Yes, I see what you mean.'

The Guru stretched out his hand, took hers, and gave a little laugh. 'Let me tell you something for your comfort. In marrying Mohan you will not be entering upon a path of easy happiness — not by any means. Your troubles, in a sense, are only just beginning.'

'Oh!' Damayanti in her turn gave a little laugh. 'And Mohan's, too, I suppose?'

'In a sense, yes! — As for you, you will be giving up a great deal that is very agreeable. In your present circumstances you get admiration, gratitude, and approval every day — and at small cost. As Mohan's wife you will get very little of these. Besides, you will be exchanging — and this is the very heart of the matter — you will be

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exchanging a relationship of dominance and submission for an *equal* relationship; and equal relationships search out the very depths of the heart. A close and equal relationship calls for patience, candour, and great sacrifices of pride. No longer will your will be able to keep a private chamber from which, solitarily, to direct your relations with the loved one. — No! Your will must exercise itself solely in keeping that chamber open to him. This is internal self-surrender, which is humility, instead of external self-sacrifice, which is pride.'

Dusk had now fallen completely, obscuring the lake. The moon had not yet risen, and the stars were bright. From the water's edge, half a mile away, there came the sound of a sail being lowered, voices calling, and the rattle of oars.

Damayanti said in a low voice, 'Guru, will you tell Mohan . . .'  
'Yes. If you are quite sure?'

She got up, stood gazing in the direction of the lake, and then replied: 'I will do as you think best. But do you think I shall make Mohan happy?'

The Guru laughed, and, suddenly amused by her own phrase, Damayanti turned to him, laughing too. Her laughter, however, sounded as if it might easily turn into tears. 'You are a hard teacher,' she said. 'I mean: Shall we succeed in being happy together? That is what I want to know.'

'I think you will. Anyhow, this is a risk that you should take. Mohan needs you just as much as you need him. You are complementary to one another.'

Together they walked up the little path from the lake.

'Well!' said Damayanti with a sigh. 'If this is a failure the responsibility will be yours.'

'Certainly!' The Guru's voice showed him to be following a train of thought of his own. 'But listen, my child! There is one more thing I must say. A hard trial still lies before you. For years you will be beset at intervals by pity, remorse, and a long, sick, aching *sense* of guilt. Times will come when you will accuse me bitterly in your heart.'

He stopped, and grasping her shoulder, made her turn her face towards him.

'Oh, Guru,' she cried, 'can't you find any escape?'

Passing a hand over his forehead, he gave a kind of groan. 'No. For there is a part of you that will rebel against this new way of

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thought. It will seek to punish you — and succeed. There is no way to avoid pain.'

'But I will get the better of it at last?'

He nodded. 'At last you will.'

They continued to walk up the slope and after a minute he began to speak again. 'For many years of my life I had a recurring dream. I was standing at sunset by a dark sheet of water, and someone was drowning before my eyes. An old, lean arm thrashed at the water; the rest of the drowning man had already sunk beneath the surface. I stood on the bank motionless. The instinct to jump in was strong, but I knew that the drowning man must drown, and that were I to come within reach of that clutching hand I should be drowned too. It was not fear, however, that restrained me, but the feeling that I had no right to jump in. So I stood motionless — and after a while agony of mind would always wake me up.

'The human spirit seems to me to be dragged in two opposite directions. The drag of the Past is towards repetition, stagnation, and peace — peace of fidelity to tradition, of obedience to authority, peace which is really decay. The other drag is towards anxiety and effort — the effort of constantly rejecting the letter of the law and reasserting the spirit. This involves a constant dying, accompanied by a constant re-birth. It is necessary to have faith — faith in the future.'

A WEEK later Mohan and Damayanti were married, and on the same day they rode away from Kishtwar.

It was in the middle of a sunny afternoon that the little cavalcade set out, and as Damayanti turned in her saddle to wave her hand to her father at the bend of the road, the pain she suffered was almost more than she could bear. It would have been quite unbearable without the memory of one or two moments in which she had succeeded in awakening the Rajah's pity. In those moments, he had spoken the words that she most needed to hear. He had confessed to the knowledge that she did indeed still love him. Rage and jealousy, to be sure, had soon gained the upper hand again, and he had withdrawn once more into a frigid, ironical composure; but in those few redeeming moments the truth had been admitted, and it could never be completely hidden again.

To her surprise, as soon as Kishtwar was left behind, she fell into a kind of peace. And day after day, as she and Mohan rode along together in the cool sunshine of the hills, this peace renewed itself. The suffering through which they had both just passed brought them together upon a level of understanding that they had never reached before. She now had a companion with whom she could share all her thoughts; now at last she was opening her heart to another human being without any reserve. It was a new experience. 'I suppose,' she said to herself, 'this is what the Guru wanted for me. I suppose this is what he meant by an equal relationship. And he was right.'

After a few days they parted from the Guru who was turning aside to visit an old friend living in solitude as a *rishi* on a lonely mountain slope. Their own destination was the Summer Palace, to which they intended to go direct — without stopping at Daulatpur on the way. Damayanti, certainly, was in no hurry to make the acquaintance of Bhoj and Lakshmi. What she wanted, to the exclusion of everything else, was to be alone with Mohan, to live the life which they had planned for themselves, a life unfettered, and untainted by the world.

Three weeks later they came to their journey's end, and the moment her eyes fell upon the beautiful, simple, old house that was

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to be her home, she was filled with delight. Its atmosphere was benign; it seemed to be promising her that her existence here would be just what she hoped.

And so the days passed by. Mohan had told her very little about his abdication, and even less about Bhoj and Lakshmi, although she had not been without curiosity. Once or twice on the journey, when he had gone off to hunt thar on the mountain slopes, she had questioned the Guru, and the latter, having been present when Akbar's representative, Bozar Khan, was arranging the abdication, had been able to give her a description of the scene. 'We were five at the conference table, Bhoj, Mohan, Bozar Khan, Moti Singh (a very influential man in the State), and I. It soon appeared that Akbar's instructions had been inspired by a spirit of vengeance. Mohan was to be stripped of everything: honour, privileges, money — all. And only once did Mohan raise any objection. He appeared to be — in fact, he was — giving very little attention to what was going on. Moti Singh looked down his nose and remained quiet. I, too, said nothing. It was left to Bhoj to give the conference the appearance of being something more than a formality, and occasionally he intervened on his brother's behalf. But never with any result. Well, when it was all over, Mohan retired to the Summer Palace, which had been made over to him together with a piece of land including some ten villages. He had asked for a bigger piece of land, but his request had been refused; and on this point — the only one on which he had made his voice heard — Bhoj didn't lend him any substantial support. A compromise was reached by allowing him the lordship of the large but infertile plateau of Laku.'

'All this is new to me,' replied Damayanti, and she added laughingly: 'Have you noticed how very uninformative Mohan is — at least, on matters of importance?'

'That's part of his character, I suppose. Anyhow, he's a charming talker.'

'But can't one be both? — Well, now tell me something about Bhoj and Lakshmi. Will they be nice to me?'

'Yes. Without a doubt.'

'Tell me something about them.'

'They will be very friendly,' repeated the Guru with a smile. 'And anyhow, you won't need to see much of them.'

Some three months after the arrival of Mohan and Damayanti at



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the Summer Palace the Guru received an invitation to pay them a visit. It was on a lovely, windless afternoon that he rode up to the house. Leaving his horse in the hands of Mukund, he went up the steps and through the hall towards the veranda, where, he had been told, his host and hostess were to be found. As he was approaching it, he heard them talking, and never had he heard happier voices. They rang out with a careless self-confidence which bespoke not only a present happiness but complete faith in the future.

When, a few moments later, he made his appearance, Mohan gave a cry of welcome and sprang to his feet. And for the next half-hour the three talked together with all the eager pleasure of those who have been separated too long.

Mohan was looking exceedingly well, but that was no great change; on the other hand, the change in Damayanti's appearance was remarkable. At Kishtwar the brilliance of her youthfulness had been dimmed. A purposeful expression, unsuited to her years, had masked it. The Guru now saw her face for the first time in all its natural softness. When, after a little, Mohan went indoors to talk to his headman, she became silent for a moment, then turned upon her guest a look that was both luminous and deep. 'All this,' she said — and he knew what she was referring to — 'All this I owe to you.'

It was not until they were all three sitting together again on the terrace in the evening that the Rajah's name came up. Damayanti had written to her father a month ago to tell him that she was expecting a child, and the answer had just arrived. 'It's the nicest letter that I have yet had!' she said. 'But all his letters have been nice. I want you to know that, Guru.'

These words were spoken a little breathlessly, and the Guru wished he could see her face; but the moon was behind her.

The next day Mohan suggested that he and the Guru should inspect some of the villages on his estate. They rode off together in the freshness of the early morning, and Mohan began at once to talk about his plans. On their journey down from Kishtwar the young couple had spent many hours discussing these same plans with the Guru, who had been delighted to see how completely Damayanti shared the interests and enthusiasms of her husband. But not once since his arrival in the Summer Palace had she gone back to the old subjects.

'I hope,' the Guru now said laughingly, 'that Damayanti isn't

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going to let home and babies engross her altogether. You mustn't allow that.'

Mohan replied in the same careless tone, and at once went on to something else. So the Guru was obliged to let the matter drop, but he was thinking, not without disquiet, that Damayanti needed this interest as an outlet for her abundant energies, and that Mohan, equally certainly, needed her help. His memory took him back to the several occasions when, after having been moved by some spectacle of human want and distress, or infuriated, perhaps, by a casuistical argument of Bhoj's, Mohan had hurried to the dell with a hastily-drafted measure of reform. Every time this happened he had been filled with the hope that at last a proper talk would follow — that this might be the starting-point for a real examination of the problems involved. But disappointment had always awaited him. No matter how earnestly Mohan began, a temperamental distaste for exploring beneath the surface of things would soon cause him to swerve aside into flippancy. Deeply hidden were the roots of this distaste, which sprang, not out of ordinary laziness but from some more complex instinct. For he was always ready to take great pains with inessentials; it was only when called upon to go to the heart of a subject that something in him balked.

The farms which they now visited presented an agreeable appearance of prosperity, but before the round was over the Guru saw well enough that this was due to the money that had been spent on them. What would happen when the flow of money (which could not, assuredly, continue at this rate) was diminished?

On their return they found Damayanti in the hall, and Mohan led the way to a room which he had made into an office. 'I have something to show you!' he announced, and it was with a boyish air of mystery that he threw open the door. Upon the wall was an enormous map of the estate. It was an amusing and decorative affair with every village, every road — one might almost say every cow-track and every tree — sketched in by his own hand. A variety of colours had been used, each one of which, Mohan explained, had its special significance. While the young man was expounding the uses of this map the Guru refrained from looking in Damayanti's direction.

The next day, as he rode away from the Summer Palace, he was in a meditative and uneasy frame of mind. He was thinking that while Damayanti knew this to be a time of holiday-making for them both

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(legitimate enough, after the tension and stress of the past year) Mohan had no such understanding of things. If he was playing at work, he remained less than half aware of it; and Damayanti, being temperamentally unable to approach any task, however trivial, in this fashion, was leaving him to follow his own devices. After all, she was probably reflecting, one had to relax in the manner that came naturally to one. Her own hobby was the garden, which had been neglected of late.

Several months passed during which the Guru learnt nothing more except that Damayanti had visited Daulatpur, and that Bhoj and Lakshmi were enthusiastic about her. This was true. A little to her surprise and much to her satisfaction Damayanti found that she and Lakshmi took to one another. Lakshmi was delighted by her quick intelligence, vitality, and charming looks, while Damayanti, on her side, discovered in her hostess one of the most agreeable women she had ever met. The Palace, too, afforded pleasures which the country lacked entirely — notably, feminine society.

When the time drew near for the birth of her child she yielded to Lakshmi's persuasions that she and Mohan should move to the Palace. The latter was by no means unwilling. He saw it as only natural that she should want some women friends about her; besides, he and Bhoj were getting on together better than ever before. Never did he enter the Palace without congratulating himself on his abdication. The conventions and formalities that had been so obnoxious to him when he was at the centre of them, now awoke in him nothing more than a faintly contemptuous amusement. He made fun of the Palace routine to Bhoj; and when Bhoj retaliated by making fun of his mode of existence, he was far from taking offence. With Lakshmi he was on easy and affectionate terms which covered a complete absence of intimacy or even of interest.

After the birth of Savitri, the couple returned to the Summer Palace, and there resumed the same life outwardly as before. But, inwardly, something was changing. Their love for one another increased in passion; and, as it did so, it became less smooth. If their passion brought them ecstasies, it also brought wild angers and despairs. With increasing frequency they had misunderstandings and reconciliations; the halcyon days, which had come unexpectedly, unexpectedly came to an end.

Savitri was a delight to them both, but it was quite often about her that they quarrelled. Sometimes, too, they quarrelled about the

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work on the farms. Damayanti had far more energy to use than could be expended on child, house, and garden alone; but her attempts to help Mohan in his work were few and brief.

Nor did Mohan want her help. He was beginning to feel very uneasy about his whole enterprise; and fear of failure made him secretive and obstinate. When Damayanti offered to take a part in his work, he was evasive, and her suggestions, which were often good, always exasperated him. He would wake up in the morning to a sense of frustration, which developed during the day into irritability.

By common consent and tacitly they abstained from seeking advice from the Guru, and when the latter suggested a visit they would find some excuse for putting him off. Mohan would not have minded receiving advice on any one particular point, but he had an uneasy suspicion that he would find it very hard, this time, to make the Guru stop there. The Guru would probably tell him that there was something wrong about his whole envisagement of the problems before him.

On her side, Damayanti was reluctant to invite the Guru because her life with Mohan had certain aspects which she did not want him to see. In particular she remembered how he had told her that she must be prepared for attacks of remorse. Well, for months she had been miraculously free from such feelings: no doubt the expected coming of Savitri had been a help to her; but now, accompanying her stormier relations with Mohan (whether as cause or effect she could not tell), unhappy thoughts about her father began to obsess her. Since her child's birth the Rajah's letters had altered in tone; they were full of bitterness and reproach. They were also much more frequent. It was not long before Mohan noticed this, and noticed, too, what a disturbing effect they had on her. No doubt he had been watching for these symptoms with a secret, and only half-conscious, anxiety ever since their marriage. It was a long time before he could bring himself to speak about them to her. For weeks he did no more than hover round the dreaded topic, picking up the subject of the Rajah's letters with a careless air and then quickly dropping it again. But one morning he said: 'I suppose your father thinks it's time that you paid him a visit?' And when Damayanti replied, uncomfortably, yes, he went on: 'Well, why don't you go? Don't you remember it was agreed between us that you should go to Kishtwar from time to time? I think you ought to go.'

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A look of intense relief appeared upon Damayanti's face. 'Oh, Mohan!' she exclaimed, 'are you sure you don't mind?'

The next moment she was furious with herself; she would have done anything to have spoken differently, but the harm was done. She saw Mohan's countenance darken. 'Of course I don't mind. You should have spoken long ago.'

This was not the beginning of a quarrel; it was the beginning of something worse, a period when quarrels brought no alleviation of strain. With a perverse insistence Mohan would call upon Damayanti to confess that she had already been suffering from feelings of remorse and guilt for a long time, and, when she admitted that she had, he would contend that her feelings were unjustifiable. To this she would never agree.

The day before her departure was a particularly miserable one. Mohan was feeling ashamed of his past quarrelsomeness and anxious to make amends. On her side Damayanti was feeling guilty for having felt guilty, and was endeavouring (not very wisely) to hide her true feelings under an air of affectionate gaiety. As the parting drew nearer and nearer both struggled desperately to break through the barrier of artificiality that stood between them. And in appearance they succeeded. But both knew that will was taking the place of spontaneity. And, although both knew as well that under the fabricated appearance the real feeling was there, that gap between appearance and reality was fatal. And the actual moment of parting was filled with dull despair.

It was on the Agra high-road that the parting took place. Mohan stood in the middle of the road waving his hand until Damayanti's carriage had become almost invisible in the distance; then suddenly his whole face underwent a change. It became dull, lifeless, almost sullen.

Glancing round to make sure that he was quite alone, he sat down by the wayside and sank into thought. The sun was hidden in a dust-haze, but he judged that several hours of daylight remained. There was time to visit Tilkat, a village that lay not more than a couple of miles off his homeward way. He had just been telling Damayanti that he intended to inspect it, and she had warmly approved.

After a few minutes he forced himself to get up and ride off. In his mind, dulled by unhappiness, incomplete thoughts came and went. He was trying not to think about Damayanti, but the image of her rose up before him at every turn. He was not looking forward

to meeting the headman of Tilkat, which was a village outside the reach of his daily rides. These more distant villages presented, as a rule, a very different appearance from the others. Damayanti knew this. What was her real opinion of him now? Had she already lost all faith in him?

After an hour spent in examining the land round Tilkat, Mohan rode on in a mood that was blacker than ever. He felt, indeed, very near despair. A sudden conviction of past, present, and future failure possessed him, and in this dark, suffocating cloud everything that he cared for was lost — including Damayanti herself. His thoughts went back to his last arrival at Kishtwar when, disappointed by her not coming to meet him, he had had a premonition of sorrow, accompanied by the thought: 'Only under dire compulsion does a man learn that which he most needs to know.'

Unable to bear the prospect of spending the evening alone, he turned in the direction of Daulatpur. At the Palace he was certain of finding a pleasant company at dinner, and a pleasant evening would follow. A failure he might be, but to make himself agreeable was at any rate within his competence. He would soon have everybody laughing at his account of his conversation with the headman of Tilkat.

And it all passed as he had foreseen, only, just as the evening was drawing to its close, things went wrong. The talk was about the rising pretensions of the peasantry under the encouragement of Akbar; and then someone quoted a remark of Damayanti's, and everybody, himself included, laughed, for her remark was wittily turned. But a drop of poison had fallen on to his heart. While it amused him to make fun of himself, it did not amuse him to think that Damayanti in this same company sometimes made fun of him. 'God help us!' he said within himself. 'This is what we have come to, she and I!'

When everyone had left and he was about to go upstairs he became aware that Moti Singh had come in, and for a moment he wondered why. Then he remembered that before dinner he had applied to Bhoj for another fifty gold mohurs, explaining that two or three thriftless villages were without any millet for the next sowing. He had made such requests before, and always with a complete absence of embarrassment. Bhoj, too, had always readily agreed. It was noticeable, in fact, that his requests for money were actually a source of satisfaction to Bhoj.

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'Your Highness,' said Moti Singh, 'will it be convenient if . . .'  
And he produced a bag of gold coins from his sleeve.

'The money? Thank you. Put it down there, will you?' He was reflecting that although nothing could be more colourless than Moti Singh's manners, the man was unable to allude to money without producing the impression that he felt himself to be on delicate ground.

Moti Singh laid the bag down on the table, and for a minute the two exchanged polite commonplaces. Mohan was waiting for him to go, but Moti Singh dallied and presently produced a little sheaf of papers which he handed to Mohan with a deprecating smile. 'If Your Highness would kindly verify these and sign them . . .'

'What?' queried Mohan, frowning distastefully at the papers. 'What is all this?'

'Receipts,' explained Moti Singh, still smiling smoothly. 'I haven't troubled Your Highness before; but we are coming to the end of the year, and it's necessary . . .'

'Oh certainly!' And Mohan sat down, dipped a quill in the inkpot and began to sign. He was secretly astonished to see what a lot of money had been paid over to him in the last year.

Meanwhile Moti Singh went on talking. He shook his head over the thriftlessness of the poor, expressed admiration for Mohan's patience and generosity; and assured him that he need have no fear that he was drawing too heavily upon the Rajah's treasury because there were a thousand and one ways in which these little drafts could be made good.

Mohan gave no reply; and as soon as he had finished Moti Singh withdrew.

Pale with rage, Mohan walked up and down the room. He knew that Moti Singh had been mocking him. Yes, Moti Singh had a thousand and one devices for drawing from some other section of the community what he, Mohan, was giving to those under his special patronage. This manner of dispensing charity was too easy! Besides, not charity but justice was his aim. He was a fool. Not Moti Singh alone but everyone was laughing at him. His life's work was not work at all but play — a rich man's hobby! And what hurt him most was the thought that probably Damayanti herself was not blind to this.

The voice of Bhoj startled him out of his distracted musings. 'Mohan! I thought you had gone to bed.' A hand was laid affectionately on his shoulder. 'You look tired. You work yourself too hard.'

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No malice was intended, but Mohan inwardly winced, and, realizing that his brother was hoping for one of their long, inconclusive talks on the question of social reform, he turned violently away.

He could not, he would not, listen to Bhoj to-night. With gentle, tireless persistence Bhoj would explain that money did not make for happiness, that the poor did not know how to use money, that leisure was no use to them either, that if you enriched them they would soon become poor again, that it was not merely the privilege but the duty of the chosen few to preserve the culture, the graces of life, which in them alone were embodied, and, finally, that just as Providence had ordained that there should be clever people and stupid people, industrious people and lazy people, so it was in the nature of things that there should be princes and paupers.

But this evening, no! He faced round to the slightly disconcerted Bhoj and said: 'Yes, I'm tired. I'm going to bed.'

For a moment the two looked at one another. 'There he is,' thought Mohan, 'dignified, modest, and self-important, fulfilling the duties of his high estate! and here am I engaged in reforming the world! A pair of clowns — nothing more!'



FOR AN hour or more after parting from Mohan Damayanti wept silently in the privacy of her curtained carriage. The thought of him riding back to the Summer Palace alone haunted and tormented her. It was as much as she could do to restrain herself from turning and hurrying home again. 'I love him,' she thought, 'and to love like this is terrible.'

So her journey was an unhappy one, and she arrived at Kishtwar with a mind still preoccupied and sad. This she was obliged to hide from her father. She wanted to appear glad to come; but she also felt that she owed it to Mohan to give the impression that her married life was happy and serene. It was difficult to strike just the right note, for her father was not only perceptive but touchy. He would be quick to think that she was flaunting her happiness before him. 'How impossible it is,' she reflected bitterly, 'to be natural! One is forced to play a part all the time in order not to be misunderstood.'

The Rajah was looking younger than when she had left him; he showed no traces of the ill-health of which he had been complaining in his letters. His manner was affectionate, but now and then he would allow an underground bitterness to come to the surface. He found many small ways of showing her that she had lost the place she once occupied in his heart, but without letting her feel that he resented her abandonment of him any the less, or even that he had become resigned to it.

Every day, while he was taking his siesta, she lay on her divan thinking of Mohan. That he was unhappy she had no doubt. She understood perfectly that he was tormented by the idea that a part of her was withheld from him. He regarded her as bound by an evil thralldom; and her refusal to admit it to be evil angered him. At times she wondered whether he might not be right.

Reviewing the period of her married life, she saw that the happiness of the first months had lulled her into a false security. She also felt that somehow she had neglected Mohan. But how? The word neglect seemed absurd, seeing how much love, how much happiness, she had given him; and yet the word neglect came back to her again and again.

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Castling about in her mind for something definite to reproach herself with, she wondered whether she had done wrong in staying so long with Lakshmi in Daulatpur. Lakshmi always spoke very affectionately of Mohan; but did she really like him? And had there not been a flavour of disloyalty in her own readiness to make jokes about the 'good life' upon which she and Mohan had embarked.

It had been planned that she should stay with her father for a month, but she had not been in Kishtwar more than ten days when she discovered that there had recently been an outbreak of a dangerous fever among the children of the district. It was plainly her duty to take Savitri away. The Rajah, who affected to know nothing about the epidemic, showed, first, chagrin and then rage. For the child herself he seemed to care nothing. Did he not in fact dislike everything that reminded him of her husband and her married state? In their final disputes all his old possessive, tyrannical temper manifested itself again. And to her dismay she found herself seized upon by all her old emotions as a child. Fear at his power over her mingled with pleasure in her power over him. For a few minutes her heart beat with a strange agitation; then, summoning all her independence of mind, she withdrew herself spiritually from his influence. Firmly but gently she insisted that she and Savitri must go.

The Rajah gave her a look that was bright with hate, and then, himself suddenly calm, replied that her dutifulness as a wife and mother was truly commendable. The memory of this passage overshadowed their parting, which took place the next day.

For the first two days of her homeward journey she felt nervously shaken; she trembled inwardly, as one who has made an escape. Not that she had ever really been in danger of losing any part of her spiritual freedom permanently, but it was bad enough to have experienced once again the old, sweet, poisonous agitation, the memory of which, strangely enough, she had lost. 'How right the Guru was!' she thought to herself. 'My old life was abominable.' And she decided then and there to visit him in his dell, before going on to the Summer Palace.

During the remainder of the journey her nerves gradually quieted down. She began once again to look at the matter from her father's point of view, and decided to say nothing to the Guru about her visit, except that it had been cut short. After all, it was the future that she wanted to consult him about. Her long meditations

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had, she felt, done much to show her where she and Mohan had gone wrong, and she was anxious to let him know this. She longed to unburden herself to him; and he might also have some advice to give her.

Early in the morning of a cool, sunny day she reached the dell, and went to the edge of the cliff. Her heart was beating hard with excitement. It would be too disappointing, she thought, if the Guru were not there! But he was. He was kneeling on the grass under his willow, brushing the monkey. The spectacle of him engaged in this homely occupation somehow reassured her, for during the last hour she had begun to feel apprehensive of him.

She gave a ringing call, which caused the monkey to leap out of his master's hands and run up the tree. The Guru turned, and, when he saw who it was, he called back in a voice that was full of pleasure and astonishment. Not many moments later they were sitting down together under the willow, and she was explaining why she had come.

He said: 'I had a premonition that someone was coming this morning; — but it was not you, it was Mohan that I was half expecting.'

'Mohan?' She was startled.

'Yes. A fortnight ago I had a letter from him. He said he wanted to see me. But the next day I got another letter, in which he said that he had decided not to come.'

Damayanti turned pale. 'What do you think that means?'

'Nothing very dreadful. I know what to make of it because I met him by accident in Daulatpur a few days later, and had a talk with him — but only a very short one, I'm sorry to say. His mind has been working on much the same lines as yours. He wants to make a fresh start.'

'What did you say to him?'

'There was no opportunity to say much. And now — well, I am very glad you have come.'

Damayanti sighed. 'Oh, Guru, why have we allowed things to go wrong? Does he think it's all my fault?'

'No. For Mohan is not stupid. Nor, of course, is his nature devoid of depths; — only, as you know, he doesn't care to inhabit them for very long at a time. In fact, the more deeply he feels about a thing the less he likes to think about it. For instance, during that year that he was waiting to marry you . . .'

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'He thought about me as little as he could!'

'Yes. His love for you was deep and he was prepared to make great sacrifices for it, but he preferred to keep his love and his sacrifices as much as possible out of his mind.'

Damayanti gave a little laugh.

'Your instinct during that year,' he went on, 'was to force him into his own depths. You were determined that he should not merely love you but be aware . . .'

'Constantly and painfully aware!'

'Of the fact. — And your instinct was a sound one. For Mohan's own sake you did well to be exacting.'

Damayanti smiled. 'I'm afraid I was moved by rather more personal, feminine reasons.'

'You wanted contact with him on a deep level. That was right.'

'And since our marriage I have not been exacting enough?'

'Well — one must exact the right things and from the right motive. Life is making a call upon Mohan all the time; it is asking for his serious attention; but unfortunately he possesses a gift for stopping his ears to that call. And you, after your marriage, felt yourself to be in firm possession of Mohan and his love, so you let him go his way without remonstrance.'

'That doesn't sound very — creditable.'

'To begin with you needed a rest. And then you gave way to the force of habit.'

'I don't understand.'

The Guru paused, then said: 'Isn't there a danger of your allowing your attitude to Mohan to become not unlike your attitude to your father?' And when Damayanti made a horrified gesture of denial, he quickly went on: 'Let me explain. Do you remember my saying something to you once about equal and unequal relationships?'

'Yes. But my relationship with Mohan is an equal one.'

The Guru shook his head. 'It has slipped away from that.'

'I don't think I understand what you mean.' A flush had risen to Damayanti's face, and she drummed with her fingers on her knee. 'Are you accusing me of adopting a "superior" attitude to Mohan? As a matter of fact I regard myself as in many ways his inferior.'

'In many ways you are without a doubt his superior, notably in executive capacity; and you know it, and so does he. But that is not my point. My point is that you have detached a part of yourself

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from Mohan and his interests. And that *has* led you into adopting an attitude of superiority to him — in your thoughts.’

‘In my thoughts!’

‘Yes. And that is what really counts.’ He paused, then went on. ‘You have given up trying to help him. Without saying anything to him, you have dissociated yourself from his work, passed a private judgment upon it, and judged it to be futile. But I am not reproaching you for doing this; I am reproaching you only for doing it without saying so to him. That is not treating him as an equal.’

Damayanti’s face had become set and hard. After looking the Guru straight in the eyes she said: ‘In actual life it is simply not possible to tell another person — however much you may love him — in fact, just *because* you love him! — all your thoughts. Any woman would tell you that, Guru!’

This time there was a very long pause. The Guru looked at Damayanti, and then looked up into the sky; he also frowned, rubbed his chin, and finally spread out his hands in a little gesture of helplessness.

‘My dear, you think me rather naive, I’m afraid?’

She nodded.

‘And my counsels, counsels of perfection?’

She nodded again.

He laughed gently. ‘Well! in spite of being a woman, you seem to be telling me pretty candidly what you think.’

She laughed too. ‘Yes. But . . .’

‘I know,’ he said.

‘Don’t give me up!’ she cried impulsively.

‘Oh no! I won’t give you up.’

They considered one another smilingly, then suddenly Damayanti bethought her of Mohan and of the meeting that lay before her, and a look of anxiety came into her face again. ‘I do want to do better!’ she said.

The Guru drew a long breath. ‘My dear child, I have lectured you so much already! I hate to begin again. But you have picked up this huge and difficult subject — the subject of communication between human beings — and placed it right in our path. Are you willing to listen?’

She inclined her head. ‘That is what I have come here for — your advice.’

‘As I see things,’ the Guru said slowly, ‘what is amiss in your

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relations with Mohan is what is also amiss in his relations with the peasants. In both cases there is a refusal to deal with the other party on equal terms. Mohan is holding himself apart from the peasants in an attempt to "manage" them just as you are holding yourself apart in an attempt to manage Mohan.'

'But,' cried Damayanti in a tone of indignant surprise, 'a few moments ago you were scolding me for leaving him too much to his own devices, now you accuse me of being too "managing".'

'No. What I am urging on you is this: not to take private counsel with yourself to manage him, but to take counsel with him for the management of your common affairs — that is, for the creation of your common happiness. It's not a thing that you can do *for* him, it's a thing that you have to do *with* him.'

Damayanti wrung her hands. 'But I've tried! You don't understand how much I've tried!'

And then, the Guru making no immediate answer, she sprang to her feet. 'May I get some water from your spring? I'm so thirsty!'

The Guru smiled up at her, and she smiled back, as if laughing at herself for her recent outburst. His eyes followed her thoughtfully as she went to the trough, dipped the cup of jade into the water, and lifted it to her lips. After filling it again, she brought it back with her, and with a long, deep sigh dropped down into her former place. 'What delicious coolness!' she murmured, her hands clasped round the cup.

'My poor child!' laughed the Guru. 'I might at least have offered you a little water before beginning my lecture.'

'No, no! A lecture is what I really need most.'

'Do you mean that?'

'I do.'

He continued to gaze at her with smiling eyes. 'You remind me of a fire running along through dry grass. A little flame here, then a little flame there! So nimble and warm, so golden — even in the sunshine!'

'After that, I am ready for anything, Guru!'

'Well, you know, it is one of my fixed opinions that the world would be a much better place if people could persuade themselves to give up hiding their true thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Politicians priests, husbands, wives, parents, children, they are all the same! and all manufacture excellent reasons for their want of candour. Each person privately decides that others are too sensitive or too

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insensitive, too weak or too inhumanly strong, too bad or too good, to "understand". So each poor creature takes it to be a matter of pride or duty, or at least plain expediency, to conceal his true self from everybody else.'

'And you think I am concealing myself from Mohan!'

'I am sure of it.'

Damayanti was silent.

'If you were telling Mohan all your thoughts you wouldn't need to come and confide in me. But you are saying to yourself that Mohan wouldn't "understand" or that you want to "spare" him.'

'Well . . .' began Damayanti doubtfully.

'Well!' interrupted the Guru with vigour. 'My reply is, first, that Mohan is entitled to know all that you are thinking; and secondly, that he ought to hear it whether he wants to or not.'

'Why?'

'If he doesn't want to, it is because he has his own private reasons, which are not good ones, for ignoring the truth. The person from whom knowledge or truth is withheld is nearly always at fault. A man is kept in ignorance, "spared", or lied to, because he wants it, because a better understanding would force him to do things he doesn't want to do, or admit things he doesn't want to admit, or renounce claims which he doesn't want to renounce. Children cling to their childishness, aristocrats to the accepted notion of the aristocratic nature, soldiers to the accepted notion of soldierliness, and so on — all for the sake of the advantages they gain by being incomplete human beings.'

'But what is Mohan clinging to?'

The Guru shook his head at her laughingly. 'I leave it to you to guess.'

'And I?'

'To the most insidious defence of all! You are clinging to the typical prerogatives of the typical Woman.'

And then, as she continued to look at him uncomprehendingly, he went on: 'My dear, what I mean is that I should like you never to think of Mohan and yourself as a man and a woman, or as a husband and a wife, but simply as two persons who love one another.'

'But I do. It never enters my head to think in any other way.'

'And yet, a few minutes ago, you were saying that it was just

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because you loved Mohan that you could not be candid with him, and that any woman would tell me the same thing.'

Damayanti was silent. Then slowly and thoughtfully she said, 'I understand. I believe you are right.'

The Guru gave a smile, and with it he breathed a long, deep sigh. 'My dear, you take a weight off my mind. And now — as for the peasants, you will find . . .'

His words died away, and Damayanti, who was looking down on the ground, did not at once see why. Her head bent, her fingers plucking at the grass, she was hiding the tears in her eyes. But after a few moments, as the Guru's silence continued, she raised her head, and, following the direction of his gaze, found herself looking straight at Mohan, who had already come down the cliff, and was advancing towards them. With a muffled cry of joy she sprang to her feet and ran to him.



For the next few months Damayanti was very happy. In her exchange of thoughts with Mohan — and never before had they found so much to say to one another — she was astonished to discover how similar their doubts and distresses had been. Together they laughed at themselves for having drawn apart to despair in private, when they had only to confide in each other to find that all was well.

All was well, at least, in the *sense* of being *mendable*; if all had not yet been actually mended, they felt strong enough in their happiness to do it. Damayanti couldn't understand how she had ever deluded herself into thinking that it was impossible to talk candidly to Mohan without hurting his feelings or making him angry. She had done him a gross injustice. She found, as the Guru had said she would, that he was just as well aware as she was that he was making no success of his enterprise; and he had gone further than she in analysing the causes of his failure. He astonished her by his insight and freedom from petty pride.

Of the two Damayanti was now the more optimistic. She was full of confidence in her ability to help Mohan. She felt that she could supply what his nature lacked. It was not in his character to keep an end firmly before his eyes and do what was necessary to reach it without giving minor considerations altogether more than their due. His fear of hurting other people's feelings, his nice code of manners, his incapacity to look upon any end as worth sacrifices of this kind, were serious handicaps. She could counter-balance them. While disliking almost as much as he did the creating of disagreeable situations, she could distinguish essentials from inessentials, and generally managed to attain her object — somehow. Her early training in her father's Palace would, she now felt, stand her in good stead.

But her radiant optimism sprang really out of happiness, and her happiness came, first, from her regained freedom from remorse in regard to her father and secondly from her renewed contact with Mohan. Their passion for one another, which had tended to contain itself in a sphere of its own, was now woven into the texture of their daily lives. Their intimacy extended itself to every level of the personality.

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As soon as they had got back to the Summer Palace Damayanti had given Mohan a detailed account of her conversation at the dell; and they discussed everything that the Guru had said. More than once Mohan fell into thought, and at the end he murmured: 'I admire your directness. Why is it that I have never been able to talk to him like that? I suppose I lack the courage.' And, a few days after, he suddenly exclaimed: 'I wish I hadn't arrived till a little later. I'm sure the Guru would have gone on to speak about the peasants. Shall I go and ask him . . . ?'

Damayanti hesitated. 'I think I know more or less what he would have said.' Then she made an effort, and changed her mind. 'Yes, go and have a talk. Even if we can't take *all* his advice, we may as well know what it is.'

So Mohan decided to go, but some time passed before he actually went, and on his return he showed a faint embarrassment.

'Well?' questioned Damayanti.

'Well!' And he laughed. 'I had a talk, but not a very long one. In the first place, I was delayed at the Palace on the way, and then . . .'

It turned out that nothing of any consequence had been said. The circumstances, it was true, had proved unfavourable, the conversation having been interrupted more than once by peasants who made demands upon the Guru's attention, but Damayanti could not help thinking that the visit need not have been completely without results. Besides, she felt sure that, were Mohan to go again, his visit would — for some reason or other — again prove abortive. She was not wholly disappointed, however; for they were both working very hard and she believed that in a short time they would be able to show the Guru that things were going well.

With every week that went by her pride and Mohan's became more deeply involved in the success of their undertaking. It was not only, nor indeed principally, the Guru's opinion that they were anxious about. His estimate, they knew, would in any case be a friendly one. But what of the Palace? It was the eye of the Palace that irked them. They could not forget that they were under a side-long, malicious observation all the time.

One evening the Guru appeared at their gates uninvited. Damayanti, who happened to be at the window, gave a little start and bit her lips when she saw him. But her next thought was that his coming was not really inopportune, for the millet crop was

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exceptionally fine, and the villages in general were looking quite prosperous. The next day, as she and Mohan showed him round, they were not without a certain self-satisfaction. But after he had gone Damayanti's feelings suddenly changed. A consciousness of topics avoided, nervous pauses, and bursts of slightly artificial talk on her part, clouded her memory of the visit. She realized that she had really not given the Guru a chance of expressing his mind. Besides, once or twice she had been rather irritable with Mohan — and he with her.

Little by little the sense of strain increased. Deep in their hearts they were asking themselves: 'If we fail, what then? How shall we find sufficient confidence to make a fresh start?' In their anxiety about the future they did not realize at first that their common life had already been affected. Their happiness was now intermittent and, at its best, somewhat clouded.

In the first months after Damayanti's return Mohan, taking pride in her efficiency, had not minded slipping from the position of partner into that of subordinate; but little by little he had grown restive; and now at last her high-handedness was rousing the spirit of anger in him. It expressed itself in airs of indifference, flippancy, and even a certain obstructiveness.

Before long Damayanti began to suffer in secret from fits of profound despondency. She saw that her ostensible successes were being won at too great a cost both in money (for what it really came to was that she had to bribe the peasants into behaving rationally) and in goodwill. There was no getting over the fact that she and Mohan were losing the friendship of the peasants, and this in spite of everything that they were doing for them. There had been great friendliness at first, but something in their relation was putting too great a strain on it. What was wrong with that relation? The Guru could tell her no doubt, but she did not want to ask him.

Day by day she and Mohan were becoming more alienated. It was, to be sure, impossible for them to drift apart as in earlier days; their personalities were attached at a hundred different points; not without a tearing of living tissue could they separate; — but this tearing had begun to take place.

In her anguish Damayanti was moved by a blind instinct to make Mohan suffer equally. They quarrelled with far more violence than before and sought reconciliation with a far more passionate

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tenderness. There would be admissions, promises, and reciprocal forgivings. But unfortunately it always happened that either one or the other went too far in generosity, confessing more, or yielding more, or promising more, than he or she could afford without the kindling of a small, secret fire of resentment. And this fire, smouldering underground, would sooner or later come to the surface, another quarrel would arise, and the whole cycle of emotions was started again.

Now, too, Damayanti's father entered into their lives once more. For the first few months after her visit to Kishtwar, he had ceased to write. Now he was writing frequently. His letters had altered in tone; they were gentle, affectionate, and unhappy. They revived her love; and with it pity and remorse re-awoke. When she was feeling impatient, frustrated, and unhappy, she remembered bitterly that her father was feeling unhappy too. And then, seeing Mohan apparently blind to all that was happening and content to let their love die, the deepest misgivings would seize her. Anger smouldered in her heart. Caring nothing about the waste of his own life, was Mohan also careless of wasting hers? In Kishtwar she had had something to live for; there, her life had been active and rich. There she had been needed. She could not help going back to that as her real grievance.

Then her emotional demands on Mohan would become inordinate. She was not satisfied until the atmosphere was charged to a point of unbearable tension. A storm would break, the violence of which would be welcome to her as proof of the intensity of their love. She needed nothing less to smother her sense of remorse and guilt.

From this life she often felt a great need to escape, and then she would spend a few days with Lakshmi. But it was not for the sake of the gay talk and easy laughter that she went to the Palace now. She wanted to give utterance to her unhappiness. But not at the cost of the smallest disloyalty to Mohan. She was on her guard against that; and Lakshmi now knew better than to offer the temptation. If Lakshmi was responsive to her at this time, it was indeed just as much in order to make confidences as to invite them. The sympathy and admiration that she drew from the little circle of her friends had long ago lost the charm of freshness, and she was too clever a woman to draw upon those sources over-long, knowing that when such wells run low they turn poisonous. Her intuition told her that Damayanti, who had fought shy of her since her return

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from Kishtwar, was now ready to give and to receive sympathy. So one evening, when Damayanti was supping alone with her, she laid before the younger woman's eyes a picture of her life. She described how, before meeting Bhoj, she had been deeply in love with someone else; and how, while she was debating whether she should obey her parents and renounce the marriage she desired, her lover committed suicide. That early love had left a mark on her that time could not efface, but in her marriage to Bhoj and in the living of her present life — with all the duties of a wife and a Ranee accepted and carried out as best she could — she found a certain peace. Happiness? Well! — and here with infinite sadness she smiled — fate had not been very kind to her. It had persistently struck at her through her affections. Her two sisters had died, her brother whom she adored had turned into a hopeless dipsomaniac, and then her mother . . . She needed to say no more, for Damayanti had seen with her own eyes the poor mad woman who was an inmate of the Palace.

Such had been Lakshmi's story, and the temptation to meet confidence with confidence was not to be resisted. Nor, indeed, did Damayanti see any good reason why she should resist. So she described her former life and the intolerable pain of her parting with her father, and her persistent sorrow in separation from him.

This conversation, which took place in the Court of the Silver Lotus, went on till far into the night, and she came away from it with a sense of alleviation and comfort. This was the beginning of a new friendship with Lakshmi, and while it ran its course, there was nothing in it that she could reproach herself with.

There came a day, however, when she began to look at it with a sardonic eye. After a long talk in which they had both been filled with a melancholy but not unpleasurable sense of the tragic beauty of their lives, there came to her, as she was lying in bed in the dark, a vivid recollection of the many occasions on which, after a quarrel with Mohan, she had been overwhelmed with rage at the thought of all that she had given up on his account. And yet, while talking with Lakshmi, she had looked upon herself as entirely self-less. As usual she had been pre-occupied by the idea that her father's need of her was greater than Mohan's, and had represented herself as torn between two conflicting devotions. Not a word about anything else. But what of the hours she spent bitterly regretting the pleasures she had lost — her father's idolizing of her, the flattering

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admiration of his ministers, her sense of busy efficiency and power? What about the scenes she had made with Mohan? And what would the Guru think of all this? She gave a wry smile as she felt the blood rise to her cheeks. And as for Lakshmi — well, hadn't she more than once, while Lakshmi was talking, found herself feeling extremely sorry for Bhoj?

For some weeks after this night of self-examination things went much better at the Summer Palace in spite of Mohan's being in one of his worst moods. He combined irritability with an acid flippancy and a show of complete indifference. That he was unhappy Damayanti knew; but she, too, was unhappy, and when she tried to reach him he repulsed her.

A period of lifeless misery followed. Quarrels no longer did any good. Although in their reconciliations they came together in a passion of contrition and love, deep down in the heart of each was the knowledge that nothing had been gained. At times Damayanti ceased to believe that Mohan loved her, at times she doubted her love for him. More than once she was on the point of leaving him and returning to her father; but while she was packing her clothes something would always break down her resolution. Sometimes she doubted whether she really loved her father, and whether it was not her rage with Mohan that created her storms of pity and remorse. When in moments of calm she pictured herself leaving Mohan to pick up her life with the Rajah she realized that that old life would now be utterly odious to her. She had nowhere to go; and this increased her terror and dismay when she perceived that just as she often longed to fly from Mohan, so, too, he often longed to fly from her.

Never in his life had Mohan been so unhappy as he was now. Not even his work was left him! she had snatched it out of his hands. When he went the round of the villages he found nothing to do, for she forestalled him with her own orders to the headmen of the villages, and neglected to tell him what she had done. For months he had fought against her usurpations, but in vain. The result was that when he was not deeply angered with her he was filled with contempt for himself.

Like her he knew times when he doubted his love, and this added to his sense of humiliation, for if he did not love her why did he continue in this life? There were also times when he doubted whether she loved him, and this caused him a sharper anguish.

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Had these last doubts ever become certainties, he would have separated from her, for he could — in his despair — have found the courage to do violence to his own love. But he could not do violence to hers. No! That he could not do. Although here again an element of bitterness entered, for he saw well enough that she knew that it was by showing love for him that she subjugated him.

He became aware of this from having seen Lakshmi behave in the same way with Bhoj, and Lakshmi did not even have the excuse of truly loving Bhoj. Damayanti's renewed friendship with Lakshmi did her considerable damage in his eyes, for by this time he had begun to feel that there was something about Lakshmi that he did not like. He suspected that Lakshmi's appeal was to that part of Damayanti's nature which had been indulged at her father's Court and which inspired her overbearing ways. His spirit was rising up in rebellion against the subtle, pernicious influence which he felt to be abroad in his little world. Instinct urged him to turn to his men friends both for their companionship and for the building up of a counter-influence; and then it was that he perceived them to be securely caught already in those invisible bonds. Bhoj's case was among the worst. Except as an instrument for executing Lakshmi's unspoken commands, he was completely negligible.

These reflections — or vague intimations, for they were hardly more — thrust him continually back into the morass of his self-contempt. Sometimes he would tell himself that he alone was at fault; that he was pettily jealous of Damayanti's father and of her Court life at Kishtwar; that he was resentful of her efficiency which exceeded his own; that he was envious of Bhoj and Lakshmi for not being, as he was, at odds with the world. And in his discouragement he was lonely; for he could not take these thoughts to Damayanti. He saw no escape from his position of shame and futility, and what kept him prisoner was actually the love they bore one another:

Nevertheless a crisis did at last arrive. One morning, as he was riding home through the fields, he overtook a man leading a horse which had gone lame, and recognized him as one of the messengers who habitually brought letters to Damayanti from Kishtwar. 'Give me your letters!' he called out. 'It will be a saving of time.' To his surprise the man hesitated, was confused, and finally, seeing nothing else to do, handed over, not letters, but a belt heavy with gold coin which was wound about his waist. 'This is what I am

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bringing to the Princess,' he said. Mohan concealed his astonishment, took the belt, and inquired casually whether there were no letters as well. The man replied no.

Riding rapidly on, Mohan struggled against emotions of utter confusion and dismay. And these very soon turned into the blackest anger.



At her marriage Damayanti had left Kishtwar without receiving from her father any dowry. She had brought away with her nothing more than her clothes and jewels. So it was possible, Mohan reflected, that the Rajah had at last come to feel ashamed of his meanness, and was now sending her gifts of money. But then why had she said nothing about it? There could be but one explanation; she had been using the money in ways that she wished to keep secret. She had been using it to cover up deficiencies and failures in their common undertaking. This year, for instance, the peasants had miraculously produced ample supplies of seed-corn, whereas last year they had had none. Only once this year had he been obliged to apply to Bhoj for more money.

Ever since she had begun to interest herself personally in the farming she had been particularly anxious that there should be no further recourse to Bhoj. Well! she was managing things — and persons — after her own fashion, — the fashion learnt at her father's Court. And the person most skilfully managed, the person most grossly deceived, was himself. Good God! Didn't she see that this was an insult? His face burned with shame and rage, but underneath, deep in his heart, there was sheer pain.

So distraught was he that he pulled his horse up, unwilling to go a step nearer home. His impulse was simply to ride away — right out of his present life, which was a failure, into some far simpler mode of existence, where at least he would not be playing the part of a fool and a dupe. To continue as heretofore was impossible.

It had been his intention to go home, change his clothes, and then ride on to the Palace at Daulatpur to join Damayanti, who was there on a brief visit. But now he hesitated. He was afraid of his own anger. What he had to say was going to bring their married life to an end, and it would be a pity if their talk were more heated and painful than it need be. Besides, he shrank from encountering her at the Palace, where her mood was always different from her mood at home.

Presently he noticed that his horse, restive under the flies and impatient to get back, had begun to move on again, and he let it have its way. He felt helpless to make any change in his immediate

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plans. The second anniversary of his wedding-day was approaching, and in the Palace vaults there were a few pieces of jewellery that were still his, having been left to him by his mother. He had intended to reach the Palace before the heat of the day, see what the jewel-chest contained, and choose Damayanti a present. But now?

His mind worked feverishly and uselessly; he was unable to think of any alternative to this course, and found himself following it like an automaton. Four hours later he arrived at the Palace, went straight up to his room, and sat down before the jewel-chest which had already been sent up there.

The silence and heat of afternoon enveloped the whole town of Daulatpur. Damayanti, like everyone else, was taking a siesta. Not a sound came in through the open windows, which were shaded against the sun. The Palace seemed to stand at the very centre of the stillness, and this stillness pressed upon Mohan painfully, for while throwing a spell over him, it did nothing to calm the turmoil deep in his heart.

Mechanically he picked up the precious stones and trinkets, and although he looked at them closely, half his mind was elsewhere. Soon he came across a bracelet which he remembered upon his mother's arm when he was still a very young child. The sense of his mother's personality and the aroma of those past days enfolded him, so that for a while he lost all consciousness of where he was or what he was doing. This relief from the pain of the present was welcome, and when he came back to himself his anger had gone. He was very sad, but not angry. He thought of the bracelet on his mother's arm, and then imagined it on Damayanti's, and after that on Savitri's. To all these three he was bound by the same tie of love. So why this anger? It had no place in the beautiful, pitiful flowing-on of human life. It looked foolish. He would go to Damayanti without anger.

An image of her sleeping face floated before his eyes, and he smiled. 'Poor child! — Poor children, all of us! What do the great gods think as they look down?'

He got up and moved towards the door. Her room was separated from his by an ante-chamber. She should be waking up now; it was time. After a moment's hesitation he decided to go in. He would tell her everything. He felt able to do it. For just as his heart was often closed so that he could not himself see what was inside,

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so now his heart was open, and he could see down into its deepest depths. He picked up the belt containing the coins, and after a moment's consideration, picked up the bracelet as well. It was not their wedding-day yet, but what did that matter?

Damayanti was still lying upon her couch, but her eyes were open. She stretched herself as he came in, and yawned.

Sitting down on the foot of the couch, he gazed at her intently, and in the semi-obscurity of the room she looked mysterious, her eyes dark and not to be fathomed. She greeted him cheerfully and began at once to talk about her plans for doing up the Summer Palace. A slow, profound sense of helplessness stole over him. The world of the spirit was not everything; everyday life had its reality as well.

It had already been agreed between them that the Summer Palace needed attention, but now, on hearing how far she had gone in her consultations with Lakshmi, he felt disappointed and a little put out. There seemed to be nothing left for them to decide together.

But what did that matter now?

It was all finished, all a mockery. He gazed at her, while she was talking, with a deepening despair, for all the petty feelings from which he had temporarily been freed were crowding back. It was not her fault, and yet he was angered. Yes, a few minutes more and he would be without protection against the great, black rage that was waiting to seize upon him again. 'What shall I do?' he asked himself. 'Can I trust myself to speak? And what have I now to say? Has the moment of emancipation gone never to return?'

Still talking, Damayanti jumped up from the couch, knelt down before her mirror, and began to apply kohl to her eyelashes. 'I must hurry,' she said. 'I promised Lakshmi . . .' But he found it impossible to listen to what she was saying, he answered at random, and after a minute she turned round to give him a puzzled and slightly nervous scrutiny.

'Mohan, is anything the matter?'

'Yes.' At that instant he decided to speak. 'I am worried.'

'What about?'

'I'll show you.' He held the belt out before her. 'This!'

'What is it?'

'Money.' And he told her about his meeting with the messenger.

She continued to look at him fixedly, but her gaze had now a wide-eyed blankness that was hostile. Or, if not hostile, at any rate.

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cold. It held him at a distance. He knew that behind that mask she was taking counsel with herself, secretly and rapidly.

‘And what do you suspect me of?’ she asked.

For a moment he was kept silent by the tumult of his thoughts, then he said: ‘I have been wondering how long you have been receiving money from your father and — what you have been doing with it.’

She gave a little laugh and got up. ‘I haven’t received any money at all from my father.’

‘Not at all!’

‘No.’

‘Then where does this come from?’ And he weighed the belt in his hand.

‘I sold some jewellery in Agra.’

They were standing face to face, and now slowly and surely — he felt it and could not resist it — the old anger rose within him ‘What did you want the money for?’

‘Have you any right to ask?’

‘Certainly. — I suspect you of intending to give it to our peasants. And I suspect you of having done the same kind of thing before.’

She drew a deep breath. ‘Mohan, do you realize that if you go on like this . . .’ She stopped, as if afraid of what was about to come.

‘Finish your sentence!’ he said.

‘We shall not be able to . . .’ Her lips closed, and she turned away.

‘To continue our present life. Yes. That is what I came here to say.’

At this she gave a little gasp, turned again, and fastened upon him puzzled, frightened eyes. ‘Oh? — When you came in you were looking so gentle, so kind.’

‘And that is why you began — but no! My God, what does it matter?’ And he walked quickly out of the room.

He left the room because he was appalled by the savagery of his emotions. Although tolerably sure that he would not actually strike her, his longing to made him ashamed. Walking up and down, he said to himself: ‘She has the insolence to threaten! And she threatens me with . . . As if I . . .’ He ground his teeth. ‘We must part at once and completely.’

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Going to the window, he drew up the blind and stared out into the blinding sunshine. 'She thinks I'm ready to become another Bhoj! After ruling over her father for ten years she comes here and sees Lakshmi . . . In fact, she can't conceive life in any other pattern.—She has known I loved her, and she has traded on it. But there comes a moment when love has to give way to — something else. I see her vision of the future — and I reject it. For me futility: for her an existence not particularly exciting, but busy and agreeable enough. She has Savitri, and perhaps more children will come. She has a house to look after; she will do some entertaining; she has this Palace to visit; and she has, finally, the gratifying task of being a good wife to her husband, "helping" him in his work, and keeping up his reputation before the world. — But,' continued Mohan, 'that future is not to be! I have something better to suggest. Why shouldn't she go back to her own home? Our marriage can be brought to an end. In fact she might yet marry Akbar.'

With the passage of these thoughts his anger lost its heat. He looked into the future with a cold, dreary indifference, seeing in it no happiness either for her or for him. His sharpest distress now was caused by the idea of Savitri's growing up in the Palace at Kishtwar, but he had no wish to separate her from her mother, nor was the life which he projected for himself one in which he could find her a place.

He saw himself becoming a wanderer. Changing landscapes, casual encounters, the unknown hazards of to-morrow's journey — these, he felt, would suffice him. It would be a life lived from day to day, but no other life could he now conceive of as tolerable.

An hour or more went by; then, raising his head at some slight sound, he saw that Damayanti had come in. She moved differently from usual — slowly and apprehensively. Her eyes, too, were anxious.

As she stood there before him in silence he was oppressed by a painful discomfort. Their misery — for she was unhappy too — their failure, their defeat, shamed him, and in order to say something — 'Have you been with Lakshmi?' he asked.

She shook her head. 'Mohan . . .!' Her breath came to her with difficulty. 'About that money . . . I want to tell you. I was intending it for the peasants, as you thought; but . . .'

He made a gesture to dismiss the subject.

'Also,' she went on hurriedly, 'I have done it before — once or

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twice. I hated your having to 'get the money from Moti Singh. But I see now that I ought to have consulted you. I'm sorry.'

Mohan looked away. She knew him to be feeling embarrassed. He always was when anyone apologized. 'Never mind!' he said quickly. 'I mean, it can't be helped.' And he got up. She could see him searching nervously for another subject. 'There are some letters and papers here that Bhoj has sent up; but I haven't looked at them yet. Nothing, I think, of any interest.'

While he was bending down over the letters, she bit her lip and blinked to keep back her tears. How well she knew what his manner meant! And this time it meant much more than ever before. It meant . . .

In the hope that she would leave the room, he was putting up a resolute pretence of reading his letters. As she watched him her spirit sank into despair. This *was* the end. But he didn't want to speak to her now; and it was because his mind was completely made up that he had the self-control to choose his time.

She decided that he should not wait. She could not bear it. It must come now. So still she remained there standing before him. He would have to speak at last.

'To turn to plans,' he said presently, still not looking at her. 'I'm thinking of going off to hunt in the hills for a bit.'

She drew in her breath tremulously. 'I see.'

'This wouldn't be a bad time to choose as far as work on the land goes.'

His voice was quite colourless. Clearly his chief desire at the moment was to avoid a scene.

'And I?' she brought out hardly above a whisper.

'You?'

'I mean, what shall I do?'

He kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. 'Well! don't you think it would be a good opportunity for you to pay your father a visit?'

She struggled, but was unable to reply. Biting her lips, she walked to the window and looked out. And so it was happening like this — quite quietly. There would be no scene. 'We have quarrelled too often,' she thought. 'One doesn't realize that something is piling up. And then, one day — this!'

She longed to turn, make a quiet answer of acceptance, and leave the room; but she could not do it. She *was* held motionless by an inability to use her limbs. Behind, he *was* still fidgeting with his

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letters — breaking the seals with more noise than was necessary, rustling the paper. It meant: 'That's finished. And now we'll behave as in everyday life.' But it was not their old life that they were going back to. It was another life in which each would be alone.

She continued to look out of the window, and, although numbed and stupefied by misery, she became aware at length that Mohan had stopped fidgeting and was strangely still. Looking over her shoulder, she saw him standing in the middle of the room and staring before him. He gave a slight start when he became aware of her gaze. 'Look at this!' he said, and held out a letter, the handwriting of which she recognized. It was from the Guru.

'My dear friends,' she read, 'for a long time I have been unhappy about you, for you are avoiding me, and I think I know why. On my last visit to the Summer Palace I saw that your lives were not as you had wished them to be, and it seemed to me that you didn't want to speak to me about it. So I was silent. But several months have now passed, and the thought that you are having troubles that you won't allow me to share fills me with anxiety and grief. For you are both very dear to me. Besides, if you are avoiding me, it must be because you consider my past counsels to have been mistaken. But — O my friends! — do you really reject my view of life? No! I cling to the hope that it is merely pride that has been keeping you away. If that is so, put it away quickly and cease to inflict upon one who loves you so much anxiety and pain.'

While Damayanti was reading this Mohan paced up and down.

'Well?' he said impatiently; and then, without waiting for a reply, 'I shall ride over to the dell to-morrow early. I am not going to let the Guru think that I don't . . .' His voice died away. 'I shall explain,' he added.

'But, I, too . . .' said Damayanti, choking.

He looked at her with a gaze that was absent.

'And what will you explain?' she asked.

As the question slowly reached his consciousness she saw him knit his brows. His eyes looked into hers, blank no longer. He was struggling to find an answer, but no words came.

'What *can* we say to him?' she breathed.

He turned his head this way and that, then sat down and said: 'We must think.'

'We!' — he had said 'we!' Her self-control suddenly failed her;

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she moved quickly back to the window to hide her blinding tears. But her shoulders began to shake, and that was just as bad. But she had no wish to appeal to pity, and, certain that his gaze was resting upon her, she succeeded by a supreme effort in holding herself still. She also steadied her voice to say: 'At any rate, you can make him feel that — that we still value him as a friend.'

He made a little sound of pain, and then she heard him get up. The room was very still, and about a minute went by. 'Don't move!' she told herself. 'You have no right to take advantage of this. It is for him to choose.'

She waited, her eyes closed.

'Damayanti!' he said. She heard him come up to her, and felt his arm round her shoulders. Her head inclined towards him, her hand clutched at his tunic; and there they stood.

His eyes, like hers, were now closed. It was as if their two spirits, utterly spent in some great battle against a common foe, were at last safe, and leaning together to take breath, leaning together in thankfulness for a dreadful peril passed; and so united by a common exhaustion and a common relief that for the time being they needed only this: to take their rest together as one. They were bewildered too. For what had happened was not the passage from one emotion to another, but a change of the being upon which emotions play. As in a critical illness there is a moment when the body says: 'I am changed,' so now each felt that an old self had died and that life henceforth would be lived with a self that was different. And in this change there was something a little sad. There was at least nothing of the elation, the exaltation, that had attended their reconciliations in the past. In this change of being something had been given up; but each had given up the same thing; each was weary with the same weariness, consoled with the same consolation, and above all thankful with the same thankfulness.

They were not troubled about plans for their future life; all that was mere detail. The inner decision having been made, the outward form would take shape. As for what had been wrong in the past there was no need to go into it. They looked into each other's eyes, and smiled; a word here and there was enough.

Hour after hour went by, and their talk gradually became more fluent. Life was calling to them again, and together they responded to its call. They were quite certain that they must abandon the Summer Palace and the neighbourhood of Daulatpur. And this decision at



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once gave birth to another which they uttered in the same breath.  
'We'll go to the tableland of Laku.'

'We'll build a small house there.'

'Do you remember how lovely it was that day when we rode and rode until it grew dark . . .?'

'And one of the peasants put us up. A nice man. Takhu, I think, was his name.'

'But to-morrow, before anything else, we'll go to the dell to see the Guru.'

The next morning, very early, Mohan woke Damayanti up. He could no longer keep his ideas to himself.

'I know where we'll build our new house.'

'Where?'

'On the edge of those trees. Near the Pool of Vishnu.'

Damayanti nodded, and then shut her eyes again. She remembered the day when she and Mohan had first come upon the pool together, and in her wandering vision the past, the present, and the future came together in a whole which had meaning.

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## PART SEVEN

### I

THE telling of the story of Mohan and Damayanti had spread over many days. Physical weakness prevented the Guru from talking for long at a time. During the still, hot afternoons he would lie in his darkened room in a condition of dreamy reminiscence; then, towards sunset, Jali would come in and settle down at his bedside. This was the hour when the Guru liked to talk. 'I wander about in the past,' he said, 'and there I find memories which I thought were lost to me for ever. I watch the red sunlight creeping along the wall, I dream aloud, and sometimes I forget that you are with me.'

In the intervals between the Guru's talks Jali's mind was filled with what he had last heard. He felt his love for Damayanti to be receiving both honour and reward. For what could be more honouring than this gift of confidence? 'I love her,' he reflected, 'not less but more.'

Sometimes, thinking about his own inexperience, he felt small and discouraged, but at other times, after listening to the Guru, it seemed to him that he was becoming very wise. One day he said laughingly, 'I am beginning to feel like a veritable sage!' and in the same tone the other replied, 'I, too, — as old men do when discouraging to the young.'

But a little later, coming back to the subject, the Guru said: 'Unfortunately, what one learns through the experience of others may be a snare. One is tempted to use second-hand experience as a protection against first-hand.' And from this he went on to urge Jali not to hold himself remote from the ordinary rough-and-tumble of life. 'You are growing up to be a Rajah and a man of thought; as such you are not likely to find hardship and danger on your path; but if, in the vicissitudes of life, you do encounter them, so much the better.'

And on another occasion he said: 'I know that it is your wish, your intention, not to stand on any real or fancied superiority in your dealings with the ordinary man, but remember that it is far easier to give up place and plan of life than habit of mind. This Mohan very soon found out. One has certain habits of mind — generally reflected in certain tricks of manner — of which one is habitually unaware. A man may be giving up money, comfort, privileges — in fact, as he thinks, everything — and yet . . .'

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‘And yet, what?’

‘And yet he is not giving up what is necessary in order to enter into true fellowship with others. Unknown to himself, he is holding something back. And so it may happen that after mixing with common men on terms of perfect equality and friendliness all day, he will give them a nod as he says good-bye, which in one instant denies everything, for in it there will be a reassertion of all the claims that he has laid aside. He may be unaware of what he has done, and the peasants may be unaware that they have noticed it. In their hearts, however, that nod has taken effect.’

‘But Mohan is not like that!’ said Jali quickly.

The Guru smiled. ‘No, Mohan is not like that. But in his relations with the peasants he still finds it difficult to prevent his habits of mind from frustrating his intentions.’

‘How?’

‘Let me try to think of an instance! — Oh yes! That peasants’ meeting when Umed Singh . . .’

‘I remember. But what did Mohan do wrong?’

‘Well, I wasn’t there. But he has told me that he gave an exhibition of quiet dignity which made the peasants feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Yet two minutes later, when alone with Damayanti, he was stamping up and down the room and storming with rage. I don’t say he ought to have behaved exactly like that before the peasants, because they were the actual offenders, but it would have been better if he had not been too proud to reveal his true feelings to them. Instead of drawing away from him in awe as a superior person they would have felt for him as for one of themselves; and many would have sprung to their feet in his defence. The invisible barrier between him and them would have been weakened instead of fortified.’

Jali flushed. ‘You are very uncompromising, Guru.’

‘Ah, my son!’ And the old man sighed. ‘It is because I know from my own life-experience what this danger is that I am so anxious to warn you against it.’

‘But what is the danger exactly?’

‘I will tell you about myself, and then you will see. There was a time, when I enjoyed quite a reputation as a holy man. Thousands flocked to see me every year, and went away singing my praises. I let no man go away without listening to him in private, and I very seldom failed to make him feel that in me he had a friend. But

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occasionally someone would come whom I did not satisfy. There was one who came again and again, and always went away disappointed. He was less self-preoccupied than the others, he gave me an impression of goodness, he was a man whom I felt to be liking me; and yet he always went away sad himself, and leaving me sad. One night I woke up and suddenly dismay swept over me, for I realized that the reason I could give this man no help was that he saw I stood in need of help and comfort myself. He saw what I was refusing to see — that my life was a sham, that I was proud, lonely, unhappy, and frightened. He saw that the more I forced myself to give to others, the less I was able or willing to receive from them. He wanted reciprocation, and that I would not admit. Beneath all my friendliness there was a small, hard kernel of pride and fear. I was bent on concealing my fatigue, my loneliness, my self-dissatisfaction. I was afraid of true comradeship and all it entailed. And he, who had a true instinct for friendship, knew this in his heart.

‘Afterwards I tried to be different; but at first without much success. The multitude came to me with humility, candour, and the courage to lay themselves bare before me, and I could not do the same by them. My secret pride had made for me habits of mind which I was quite unable to break. During this period I saw more and more clearly that those who were healed by me were in many ways my betters. For a time I tried to persuade myself that it was my duty to “do good”, even if I had to be a play-actor to do it. But it soon struck me as suspicious that, while as a holy man I could keep at my task for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, when I tried to meet others on terms of equality I became exhausted in half that time. — In the end I gave up all pretensions to being superior to anybody else.’

While Jali was considering this, he added: ‘To assume a position of superiority, to take up one’s stand upon some moral, intellectual, or social advantage is a thing that one often does without being aware of it: that is my point. — But now — would you like me to tell you about the early days at Hawa Ghar?’

‘Yes,’ returned Jali with eagerness. ‘Tell me, please, about Damayanti. Was she happy?’

For a few moments the Guru made no answer. He looked at the young man with a smile. ‘There is such a lot to say! The change from Summer Palace to Hawa Ghar was much harder for Damayanti than for Mohan. And she knew it would be.’

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‘Why harder?’

The Guru considered, then replied: ‘A less intelligent woman might have undertaken more lightly to make the change, and would have made it at a smaller sacrifice. But Damayanti counted the full cost and accepted it. My fear at that time was lest she should take up the position: “I am doing this for Mohan’s sake. As for the ideas behind, I neither believe nor disbelieve in them. Let it remain at that!” This would have been the typically feminine attitude. But only once did she resort to it. One day she came back from a talk with Lakshmi to say that it was all a question of one’s point of view, and that after looking at the matter from other points of view, she really didn’t feel capable of forming an opinion of her own. But, she added, she was content to rely on *my* opinion.’

‘What did you answer?’

‘I was very much disappointed, for people who take up that position cling to it as a rule very obstinately. All I said was that to live is to think and feel and act, and that it is consequently impossible to live on the principle that you do not know how you should think or feel or act. Besides, if you really are not sure about anything, how can you be sure that you are sure about that?’

Jali laughed.

‘You may laugh,’ said the Guru, ‘but this attitude is very common, and is often used to excuse a bad way of life or made the basis of a very pernicious kind of tolerance — I mean a refusal to condemn wicked and foolish views. To my great relief, however, Damayanti, like you, laughed and abandoned that position.’

‘She is very honest,’ said Jali, and again his tone made the Guru smile.

‘She is, indeed!’ he agreed. ‘And capable of great detachment, too. I remember one afternoon in the Summer Palace when, turning my head, I caught her gazing at me with that almost menacing intentness which her eyes sometimes have. Do you know what I mean?’

Jali nodded.

‘I was moved to exclaim: “Do you hate me?” But the next moment I answered myself. “No, you do not. It is really most remarkable.”’

‘“Why should I hate you?” she asked.

‘I might have replied “Because I have harried you from the very moment we met!” but all I said was that I had noticed how fond of

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the Summer Palace she had become. Indeed, I could see that she thought of it as home, and as Savitri's home. Not too grand, pleasantly aged, beautiful with the beauty of a dignified tradition, that old house, to her sense, breathed security. To live there gave you, she felt, a place in the world from which you need envy no one — a place, too, not so grand as to make you a target for envy. Besides, in making her choice Damayanti knew well what she was doing, just as you knew, when you left the Palace at Daulatpur to come here. But for you the cost was insignificant; for Damayanti to set the people of the Palace at naught meant infinitely more. I am not speaking of the sacrifice of social prestige, agreeable company, or the graces of life; I am speaking of — what? Can you guess?

Jali shook his head.

'Well!' said the Guru slowly, 'it is like this. In a woman's life essential human values, social values, and sexual values are tangled up in a very complicated way. Compared with a man, a woman has much more to lose and, ostensibly, much less to gain, by being unworldly.'

'Did Damayanti feel this?'

'She did. She saw from the beginning what tremendous renunciations were involved — the sacrifice, in fact, of certain parts of herself to which she felt that she, as a woman, had a right.'

'I don't yet understand.'

'I have not yet finished. Damayanti saw that in the future, not being able to rely upon the world for her self-confidence, she would have to rely upon herself. Moreover, she would not be able to rely upon that part of herself which was of the world. She would have to disentangle that part of herself which was essentially personal and regardful of universal human values from that part which was social and sexual, and regardful of the values of the world.'

'Why do you put the social and sexual together?'

'Because the world expects a woman to trade upon the fact that she is a woman. Moreover, a woman like Damayanti is encouraged by society to think of herself as a Princess — a great lady — and great ladies are conventionally encouraged to display a good many odious characteristics.'

Jali laughed, but of a sudden stopped and knit his brows. 'Men are also encouraged to think of themselves in that way.'

'Yes.'

'I am thinking,' said Jali, 'of Randhir.'

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The Guru looked at him intently. 'Randhir?' And then he went on: 'I understand. Damayanti has told me about the talk that you and she had just before we started for Agra. — It so happens that I was thinking about Randhir this afternoon. I was feeling remorseful about him.'

'What reason have you to feel remorseful?'

'I'll tell you.' A look of sadness had come into the Guru's face. 'I knew Randhir fairly well. He was a fine man. You felt that too. And you feel that his death was not a good death, and you are right. Well, this is why I can't think of him now without self-questioning. He came to the dell one day when Hari was there, and told us what he was going to do. And I said very little. Could I have said more? Could I have overcome the sense of impotence that oppressed me? Could I have drawn Randhir aside and said: "My friend, don't do this! Take your courage in both hands and turn back! There *are* things in the world really worth dying for — just as there are things really worth living for. And in your heart you know it. Things vital, and hopeful, and good are hard by — within the grasp of your hand. And it is because your hand does not dare grasp them that you go through life without hope. I say: "Take your courage in your hand!" because, although people like you will go to their deaths with a smile, they are not brave enough to choose the right thing to die for."

'Would it have been any use to say that? No doubt Randhir was telling himself that he was going to his death for the sake of his own pride and self-respect. Ought I to have said to him: "Randhir, what is the value of this pride and self-respect, when, having no roots in anything outside themselves, they bring no vital sap, and let you slowly wither in a secret acceptance of joylessness? What kind of pride and self-respect is that which gives a man nothing to live for? If they offer nothing but hollow appearances? If they turn a man into a play-actor, who goes through life with fine gestures, a lordly bearing — and behind them an empty heart — what then?"

The room in which they were sitting was now dark. Jali rose, went to the window, and threw back the shutters. A crescent moon, low in the east, was shedding a faint light over the plain, and his mind went back to that hot, dark night in Agra, full of wind and dust, when the ghost of Randhir had walked along by his side. He thought of the great house where Ambissa's party was going on,

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and the little room where he had waited with the hum of talk filtering down from the crowded rooms above. And then Ambissa, plump, upright, scented, had come hurrying in . . . 'What a world!' he now said to himself. 'What tragic monkeys we make of ourselves!'

Going back to the bed, he sat down beside it again. 'Are you tired?' he asked. 'Shall I go away?'

The Guru shook his head.

For a long while no one spoke, but at last the young man gave a little laugh and said: 'Do you remember that evening in Agra when we were waiting by the river? and how the washer-women were singing:

"Every woman is a spider,  
Her body is a web,  
She spins it on a fig-tree . . ."

'Yes, I remember.'

'I was thinking about that, and I was thinking about Ambissa, Srilata, and Devi at the same time.' And he described the three women talking together in Ambissa's little, back room, and how the scene had affected him.

It was too dark to see the Guru's face, but he could guess that he was smiling; and yet the voice that presently came to him out of the dusk had sadness in its chord.

'It so happens that I can tell you something about Ranee Devi. I talked with her a few hours after she had received the announcement of her husband's death. I had gone to the Palace at Daulatpur to see Mohan, and she was there with Lakshmi when the news came. Lakshmi broke the news to her, and, a little later on coming out of the room, gave me a description of what had passed between them. I — well, I felt much as you, I imagine, would have felt. But after four hours had gone by, during which Ranee Devi had been alone, I was called upon to go in to her. She was being tortured by doubt. She knew to what degree she had been responsible for Randhir's death — a wasted death — to say nothing of his wasted life. And now she was asking herself whether the sentiments that had made her urge him to go to that death were *really* as fine as she had wished to think them. There was very little I could say to comfort her.'

Jali said nothing, and after a moment the Guru went on: 'Nearly all people, irrespective of age, class, and sex, like to take their case on a plane of existence which is hardly personal at all. It is not a



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good way to live, but when you see people feeling and acting in this fashion do not make too much of it. The typical is not deeper, nor more potent than the personal.'

'Are you sure?' said Jali in a low, uncertain voice. 'Sometimes it seems to me . . .'

'No, you need have no fear; although I must admit that the typical has great power in the world. Its power is that of any collected body of men. The body may be a cold, enduring, official body, such as a body of lawyers, or it may be a short-lived, passionate body, such as a hungry mob. In either case the intelligence animating it is narrow, crude, and cruel. For these bodies are bodies of artificial monsters which change their shape, their activity, and their powers, as men's conventions and delusions change. Behind these monsters there is not the power of Spirit. Spirit in its human manifestation resides in persons, and that is why the personal is also universal. The personal alone is universal. The popular leader, the subtle statesman or lawyer — they speak only for the monster of the day, and their words die. But the man who speaks out of his own personal depths speaks for all men, is heard by all men, and his words do not die. His is the voice of Spirit, by virtue of which humanity is eternally one.

'When a man surrenders to the typical, he joins a small artificial body of men, entering in contact with them on a superficial level in order to lead a shallow life. He is afraid of entering into contact with humanity, which can only be reached upon a deep level — the level of the personal life.'

'Why are men afraid of the personal life?'

'I think you already know — at least in part. But I will add this: The personality has wild and terrible depths. It contains demonic forces of which men are afraid.'

Jali was silent.

'What human beings have to do,' the other went on quietly, 'is to rule those demonic forces instead of running away from them and denying their existence — as men so often do, or consenting to become enslaved to them, which is the tendency of women. For a long time Mohan ran away — from himself, from Damayanti and from true personal contact with his fellow-men. For a long time Damayanti was partially enslaved.'

He meditated a few moments, then continued: 'What does our mythology tell us? That out of the sexless and undifferentiated

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Brahm there came forth, first, the male principle which was contemplative and imaginative, and then the goddesses of action and passion. To them the woman is perhaps nearer than the man is. In the soul of the woman there are, I think, more conflicts than in the soul of the man, because her desires are more divided and self-contradictory. If she succeeds in establishing a real, inner harmony it is at a greater cost — and to her greater glory. It is not easy for a woman to understand or admit that loyalty to the Spirit must be preferred to the rival loyalty demanded by the demonic powers, who violently protest that they are Life itself. A woman therefore in order to free herself has to decide to be untrue to what she feels to be both a part of herself and greater than herself. When Damayanti decided to give up her father for Mohan, and again when she decided to give up the Summer Palace for Hawa Ghar, she had to fight against instincts that seemed to her to be speaking with the voice of conscience. For whatever else life may be it is tension, and it is from the tension of family and sexual ties that human beings obtain the most violent sensations of being alive. This is the reason why women are so firmly held by the bond between parent and child, between husband and wife. Next in degree of tension come the relationships belonging to the world of social competitiveness. No relationship that is not one of reciprocal domination and submission, no relationship, that is to say, that is without strain and anguish, will seem to most women to possess the full value of reality. Pure friendship, even at its strongest — pure love, even that of Jesus Christ — are apt to seem cold and unsubstantial by contrast.

‘But Damayanti is a remarkable woman, and she has found more happiness than falls to most women. From the beginning, as you know, I urged her along a way of life that was not the way of self-sacrifice — which would have been easy to her — but along a way of self-conquest. I say I urged her, but not by appeal to those emotions which a woman most needs as incentive. For the incentive to follow Spirit can only be the spirit. There is that in a woman which is readily kindled by the flaming heart of a Saint Theresa or the burning brain of an inspired man. But Spirit, which is neither heart nor mind, calls only to that part of our human nature which is more than human. Damayanti has followed her own light, not mine, nor me.’

At the end of a long silence Jali said: ‘One would have thought

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that very little would be left of a woman — or of a man for that matter — after putting away so much.'

The Guru laughed gently. 'There is always more left than there was at the beginning.'

'In my life,' said Jali slowly, 'I shall be tempted to compromise.'

'If you are talking of the outward life,' returned the Guru, 'I should advise you to do so whenever you can.'

'Is that permissible?'

'In practice certainly — in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts — to say nothing of avoiding priggishness and cant. But compromise is not the same as adulteration, and adulteration is not permissible even in the smallest degree.'

'Adulteration of what?'

'Of the basic intention. Intention must never be adulterated; nor does it admit of degrees. A terrible purity of intention is demanded of man.'

His long afternoon talks with the Guru were the centre round which Jali's life revolved. His mornings he spent in the fields with the peasants, and in those hours found plenty of time for reflection. The days went by in a happy activity both of body and of mind, and no longer did he suffer from loneliness. Savitri had returned with her nurse from Daulatpur, and at the Guru's suggestion he took to giving her the lessons which she had been receiving from her mother. In the absence of Damayanti Savitri seemed more grown-up. Her intelligence was well awake, although at her work she was not exceptionally clever. Damayanti, as a child, must have been quicker, he thought; but then Savitri had inherited not a little from her father. She had Mohan's self-mocking humour, and, while anxious to please refused to take her education very seriously. What she liked best was to accompany him on his visits to the farms, and never did he get on better with the peasants than when she was there, for her unceremonious manners counteracted his own tendency to over-politeness.

The Emperor's new edicts, which were now being put into operation, had brought the peasants new hope. Cases of hardship were being examined daily and numerous injustices had already been redressed. Mohan, too, reported that in Daulatpur the tables were now completely turned, Moti Singh being everywhere on the defensive. 'As for Bhoj,' he wrote, 'I can see that on the whole he is pleased. He is glad to be relieved of the pressure that Moti Singh, backed by the Sesodia, was putting upon him.'

And in another letter he announced: 'Lakshmi and Bhoj have got their invitation at last! And it's amusing to think that the new edicts are actually the cause of it. For the Sesodia is now firmly convinced that Bhoj had somehow got wind of their coming. He credits Bhoj with a lot of inside knowledge and much cunning. I think he is going to take his cue from him — at least for a while.'

It was Jali's habit once a week to visit the Gujars who were now settled on the higher reaches of the tableland, and Savitri persistently begged him to let her come too. One day at last he consented, although for her the ride would be a long one.

The morning on which they set out was gloomy and hot, with

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heavy clouds hanging low overhead. During the night he had dreamt unceasingly of Damayanti, and this had thrown him into deep dejection. As he rode along the desolate landscape affected him to such a degree that he was quite unable to pay attention to his companion except to wish she were not there. All his newly acquired detachment and resignation had gone; although still able to see things as they were, he demanded vainly and rebelliously that they should be different.

So the ride was not a particularly cheerful one for poor Savitri either. It was characteristic of her, however, that, having seen how it was with him, she stopped her chattering and retired philosophically into herself. Now and then he would cast a guilty glance in her direction, but very soon her far-away looks made him decide he could leave her where she was.

As soon as they were in the company of the Gujars, however, everything was changed. This charming folk lived contentedly in the present, and brought one close to the material world in its most companionable aspect. Their bright, beady eyes were always fixed with interest upon what lay immediately beneath their hands, and their hands were always busy. Living in a kind of affectionate intercourse with the objects of their daily use, they were never in a hurry to be finished with the task of the moment. Boredom was unknown to them, and the idea of spare time never entered their heads.

Pasang, a young man with whom Jali had made good friends, was found sitting in the opening to his tent, fashioning a trap for the hares which were numerous here. He displayed his handiwork with beaming smiles that creased his fat cheeks in the most comic fashion. With Pasang they went round the settlement, taking note of what was lacking in order to have it supplied. The settlement was not particularly prosperous, but the Gujars never made complaint and seemed contented enough. Their food was well cooked, as Jali had already discovered, with a foreign flavour that was interesting, and he was pleased when Savitri liked it as much as he did. They ate in the open, a few drops of rain falling out of a thunderous sky.

'It will rain hard soon,' said Pasang, 'and you will be very wet.' They all looked up and laughed; to feel hurried or to mind the prospect of a drenching seemed impossible here; life was not lived like that.

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Although it was still early afternoon when he and Savitri left the encampment the day had grown dusky, so low and thick was the carpet of cloud. The air, too, was completely still, and this gave a peculiar significance not only to every sound but to the landscape itself. Every reed in the marshes was standing up stiff and straight, as if it were insusceptible of movement, and unchangeable to the end of time.

Jali had intended to push on fairly fast, for it was a long way home, but actually they went much of the way at a slow walk. Sometimes they talked and sometimes they were silent; but now in their silences they seemed to be still together. At one moment Savitri roused him out of his reverie by something she said about the Guru. 'At night he sometimes gets up and walks about quietly in the moonlight. I saw him once out of my window.'

'You saw him!' cried Jali in surprise. 'Are you sure it was he?'

'Oh, yes! Besides I asked him about it the next day, and he said that as the sun still made his head ache, he sometimes got up and walked about at night. What does he talk to you about for so long every day?'

'Your mother,' said Jali after a slight pause.

'Then you must know a lot about her by now.'

'I do.'

'Is she as nice as you thought?'

'Nicer.'

Savitri looked pleased.

Mother and daughter, he now reflected, were in many ways very much alike. It was extraordinary how much youthfulness and gaiety remained in Damayanti in spite of all her hard experience. In experience he stood, perhaps, halfway between her and Savitri; but just as Savitri's lack of experience made no difference to him, so his made no difference to her mother.

So deeply did he lose himself in these thoughts that Savitri had to repeat her next remark three times before she could get his attention. 'What can you be thinking about!' she exclaimed. 'You aren't asleep because your eyes are open. Or can you sleep with your eyes open like a snake?'

'No, I can't.'

'Then what were you thinking about?'

Jali considered, and said: 'I shan't tell you.'

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‘Why not?’

Half impatient, he turned his head to look at her, and for a moment their eyes met. ‘How absurd you are!’ he said, laughing. ‘Must I tell you all my thoughts?’

‘Why not?’ Her face was bright with mischief. ‘Why not? Why not? — Are you ashamed of your thoughts?’

‘I’m not in the least ashamed of them.’

‘Then tell me them all — every one!’

‘Very well. I will — some day.’

On this she became pensive, and he asked himself if there had been something in his tone to account for it.

‘Come on, Savitri!’ he said, ‘we had better trot. It’s beginning to rain.’

They trotted a little way and then fell back into a walk, for Savitri was tired. Large, heavy drops were falling, making dark stains upon her silk tunic. ‘I’ve lost my coat!’ she exclaimed in sudden dismay; and they remembered that she had left it in one of the Gujar’s tents. ‘I’ll lend you mine,’ he said.

They stopped, and while he was leaning forward to tie his own coat about her shoulders, it seemed to him that she assuredly was the most exquisite little creature that the earth had ever seen. She remained very still and docile while he was arranging the coat, not moving even to pull her hair out from under the heavy folds. ‘There!’ he said at last, giving her a pat.

‘And now,’ she observed maliciously, ‘it has stopped raining.’

He looked up, and so it had. But the clouds were blacker than ever, and the sun very low. It was spreading a gleam of gold along the western horizon.

‘When you tell me what your thoughts were, shall I like them?’ she asked.

He was taken aback, and felt himself to be actually blushing. ‘I hope you will.’ Giving his reins a jerk, he set both their horses into a trot again. ‘Come along! It will soon be pitch dark, and we have six miles more to go.’

The great plain, lit by the light that broke through between the low clouds and the horizon, shone with a wild, deep glow. On Savitri’s face there was a look of content.

They went on in silence until to his surprise he caught sight of two men in the distance riding towards them. ‘Now who can those be?’ he murmured.

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For a minute Savitri stared hard, then she cried out: 'I think one of them is father!'

'Your father! But I had no idea he was coming back.'

'Nor had I.'

'But it is he!' said Jali, and he spoke with relief, for there were still lawless men about, and Rabindra had advised him to get back before nightfall.

A few minutes later the meeting took place and he was astonished on seeing that Mohan's companion was Hari. But it was no moment for conversation, for the rain was now coming down in torrents, and with it there had sprung up a strong wind. However, as they were all cantering along together, he called out to Hari: 'What brings you here? Have you had any news of my mother?'

It was difficult to hear or to make oneself heard, but Hari shouted back: 'Yes!' and after a minute the young man succeeded in making out that his mother and Gokal were to be expected to arrive in Agra in about a week. As for his own presence in Daulatpur, Hari explained that Akbar had sent him to make a report on the situation there with special reference to the working of the new edicts. That Hari should have been chosen for such a mission seemed odd, but the young man passed it over indifferently, his mind being entirely occupied by the prospect of having to leave Hawa Ghar. Very unhappily did he finish the ride, for it seemed to him that to be obliged to leave Hawa Ghar before Damayanti's return was a piece of misfortune too cruel to be borne. The wrench was coming so suddenly too. For Hari was starting back to Agra early the next day, and naturally expected him to come at the same time. He spent the evening in the deepest gloom.

Soon after daybreak they were off, with Hari in the best of spirits and very full of talk. It was abundantly evident that he was still enjoying the Emperor's full favour. 'I volunteered for this job,' he told Jali, 'because I saw a way of doing the Guru a good turn; and, heaven knows, I owe him one! I am going to report that the new edicts work to perfection, that everybody — including Bhoj — is delighted with them, and that Daulatpur has become the most peaceful and contented State in the Empire.'

This was agreeable to hear; but was it quite true? After hesitating for a moment Jali replied: 'I suppose you told the Guru what you were going to say?'



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Hari laughed. 'Not exactly. But the responsibility is mine anyhow.'

'The young man was silent. To his certain knowledge the Guru had had a long talk with Hari before leaving Agra; and another talk had taken place not twelve hours ago. Without a doubt Hari had been listening to words of warning, and yet his self-confidence could hardly have been more exuberant. All day, as they rode along in the bright sunshine, his gay description of his Agra life continued. It was an exciting, vivid, and amusing picture that he painted, and by the end of the day Jali felt somewhat reassured. It was reassuring to hear that Mabun Das had been reinstated in office with all his former power. 'And,' cried Hari triumphantly, 'Mabun and I understand one another. I can count on that man to stand by me through thick and thin.'

Nevertheless, before they had reached the end of their journey, Jali was once more full of misgivings and even a little bored. His interest was dimmed by incredulity. Nothing that Hari said sounded as if it could be wholly true.

And yet much of what seemed most preposterous must be true, for it was too preposterous to be invented. He marvelled with a perplexity that was coloured by disgust. When every allowance had been made for Hari's typically 'historical' presentation of the scene — a presentation in which every incident and every character were given a meretriciously dramatic value — what remained was garish enough. The world of public affairs resembled nothing more than a monstrous schoolroom in which grown-up children were playing with brightly-painted and very dangerous toys. An extraordinary crudity of feeling and vulgarity of aim were displayed by the actors on this stage. No sensitiveness, no scruple, nothing but cunning to be seen anywhere! And how should it be otherwise, when by the rules of the game the biggest rascal was always given the best chance?

On arriving at Agra he went straight to the Old Palace, where Hari had arranged that he should be lodged. He found it strange to be once again treading the corridors down which he had wandered as a nervous and unhappy child. 'Thank heaven!' he said to himself, thinking of Savitri, 'not all children are as I was.'

A little later, in the cool of the evening, a note came from Hari summoning him to the terrace. It was not the terrace where the Guru had had his audience but another which he remembered from earlier days. This, his first glance told him, was the place where

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important Court personages gathered at the end of the day to take the air, exchange news, and display themselves. An atmosphere of intense self-consciousness reigned, emanating — as it were, visibly — from those airs of unself-consciousness which everyone was at such pains to wear. Intimidated, Jali halted for a moment on the outskirts of the gathering, but when he saw that the look of having an important message for an important friend was being widely worn, he felt equal to the situation, and was soon wandering about in comparative comfort. Hari he could not find anywhere, but it was not very long before he came upon Mabun Das. Yes, here was Mabun! In raiment very unlike the fugitive in the cave, but otherwise just the same!

Most friendly, and at the same time most characteristic, were the greetings that Mabun gave him. In quick succession he made a laughing reference to their last meeting, inquired after the Guru's health, expressed the hope that Ranee Sita and Gokal were making a good journey, and asked if Jali was quite comfortable in the quarters assigned to him; then, giving the young man an affectionate pat on the shoulder, he turned away.

Jali was already moving on, when he felt a detaining hand laid upon his arm. 'Just one word more!' Mabun's mouth was now quite close to his ear. 'I'm not altogether happy about your uncle Hari. Please see if you can persuade him — directly or indirectly — to leave Agra for a while. I have spoken to him myself of course, but without much effect.' He paused, and then with a touch of impatience, as if expecting a quicker response, went on: 'You understand? You can give your mother a hint. Tell her I can't get him to realize that enemies are dangerous.'

With that he was gone. Confused and troubled, Jali would have liked to ask questions, but Mabun was already talking to someone else. And then, to his increased confusion, he noticed that three young men were staring at him from about twenty yards away, and that one of them was none other than his cousin Ali. It was odd how unpleasant the mere sight of Ali was.

Instinctively he turned his back, but a few seconds later the temptation to throw a glance over his shoulder overcame him, and to his disgust he saw Ali detach himself from the two others and approach. He stood still, pretending not to see.

The next moment Ali's voice sounded in his ear. It had a tone of artificial cordiality that committed the speaker to nothing, exposed

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him to nothing, so brassy with conventionality was it. Ali could have ignored a rebuff and strolled on with his front unchanged. But Jali was never ready with rebuffs, and certainly never less ready than now, for Ali, seen at close quarters, threw him into wonderment. His cousin's good looks were still there; but, that face, although it remained unblemished, had somehow become unspeakably treacherous towards the wearer of it. It betrayed Ali so badly that he lowered his eyes.

After proffering a few empty phrases Ali strutted away. Looking after him, Jali continued to marvel, for into his mind there had come the thought, 'And this is Hari's son!' After a minute he gave a shrug. 'I'm going!' he murmured out loud, and forthwith began to thrust a way for himself through the crowd which was now very thick. So bent was he on escape that he would have pushed unceremoniously past Rajah Bhoj without seeing who it was, had not a suave and familiar voice arrested him. 'Rajah!' he cried, and his accent was one of unfeigned pleasure. 'How nice to see you again!'

But although Rajah Bhoj's personality stood forth from among these others with a flavour that was agreeable enough, and although the Rajah, on his side, had sounded a genuinely friendly note at the moment of their encounter, it was not long before the young man decided to move on again. Something — a faint discomfort — in Bhoj told him that he had made no mistake in supposing that Lakshmi and her friends had resolved to drop him; and it was a shame to keep Bhoj standing there with that smile of half-guilty cordiality on his lips. Moreover, he perceived that little as Bhoj needed to be socially on his mettle, yet he — even he! — was not proof against the atmosphere of this company. Social self-consciousness held him in its grip.

On getting back to his room the young man exhaled a deep breath, shook himself, and dropped on to the divan. But the next moment he started up again, for he saw that two letters had been brought him in his absence. One (which had been sent on from Hawa Ghar) was from Damayanti. In a few lines she announced her near return home. The other was from his mother.

He read the letter over several times and then fell into thought. During the months of their separation his love for his mother had often made him long to see her again, but he had no desire to pick up his home life — not in its old guise nor in any new one. Besides — and this had become of prime importance — her com-

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panionship could not possibly make up to him for the companionships he would be losing. So while he sat still in the gradually darkening room a happy excitement took possession of him. For unless she in her writing or he in his reading were making some extraordinary mistake, she could not possibly reach Agra for another month at least. There was plenty of time for him to return to Hawa Ghar and see Damayanti once again!

He examined the date of the letter, made repeated calculations of time and distance, and always came back to the same conclusion. It followed, then, that Hari must have made a mistake. And was there anything particularly improbable in that?

A LITTLE later a servant came to conduct him to Hari's new house where he was to dine. Although he had been expecting considerable splendour — for Hari had informed him with a grin that he was living handsomely at Akbar's expense — the size and magnificence of the mansion into which he was introduced fairly made him gasp with astonishment. Such vast halls! so many lights! so many servants! what an air of barbaric grandeur! He stared about him, much amused — and wished that Hari were there to enjoy his amusement — as he undoubtedly would. But although Hari had asked him to come early he remained inaccessible, and it was not until the other guests had all arrived that he made his appearance.

He made it with great *éclat*, bursting into the hall as on a whirlwind, with a huge train of servants at his heels, while musicians posted outside struck up a festal music. For the next few minutes the whole place resounded to the salutations which he shouted at the top of his voice; and then, amid a din of loud voices and louder laughter, dinner was begun.

By this time Jali had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to see what his uncle was at. Hari had evidently been seized by the idea of adopting a spectacular, semi-barbaric style of living — not a bad idea, perhaps, for it was certainly well suited to his newly-developed political rôle — and to his gifts, which included a pretty sense of buffoonery. His dress, for this particular occasion, was that of his own hill country, which was gaudy enough, but made gaudier by touches of his own devising. Everyone, Jali noticed, treated him with respect, although signs of affectionate amusement were not wanting — especially among his own brother officers, who formed about one-third of the company. The young man on Jali's left, for instance, could not look at his host without bursting into loud peals of laughter. Every now and then, too, he would dig his neighbour in the ribs to draw attention to some feature of the entertainment which he regarded as more richly absurd than the rest.

On Jali's other side was a middle-aged man, Lal Mehta by name, who looked rather out of place in this lush, boisterous assembly. Jali felt grateful to Hari for having given him this neighbour. Lal Mehta, if a little colourless, was intelligent, and, as Jali soon found

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out, knew everything about everyone. It became obvious, too, that he was a loyal friend of Hari's and after a while the young man felt no hesitation in repeating to him what Mabun Das had said on the terrace.

Lal Mehta nodded. 'Mabun is quite right of course, Hari's not really made for this kind of life. He's too good for it.'

'Too good for any kind of public life?'

'Too good for *this* kind, anyhow.' He shrugged. 'Perhaps for any kind. Either one turns mountebank and makes a career, or one grinds away conscientiously, as I have done, and grows dull.'

Jali gave his interlocutor a smile in which there was both liking and respect, then asked whether Shaik Mobarek and Abdul Fazl were likely to be dangerous to Hari.

Lal Mehta pursed his lips. 'They won't poison him, if that is what you mean.'

'Is anyone likely to poison him?'

'Well! — not if Mabun Das can help it. And he's looking after him pretty well.'

The dinner went on nearly all night. Some of the guests had to leave early, others arrived late. They varied in age and occupation, but there was one point they all had in common: they were all in the best of spirits. A strong current of excitement and satisfaction was running through the whole group and for the first time Jali realized that these men, one and all, were victors.

The long bitter struggle between Salim's party and Daniyal's had ended in their securing the victory, and now they were dividing the spoils. Their talk was nearly all about places and preferments. They were brimming over with a naive, undisguised gusto. Occasionally someone made a reference to 'poor old so-and-so' who had 'gone'. It was done without vindictiveness — merely with satisfaction.

'Are Mobarek and Abdul Fazl among those who have "gone"?'

Jali asked.

'Hardly that. But nobody pays much attention to them.'

'Who had Mabun in mind when he said that Hari had *dangerous* enemies?'

'His former wife, for one,' returned Lal Mehta promptly. 'But I'm glad to say that she and her new husband Makh Khan have retired — for the time being, at any rate — into private life. They have left Agra. There are plenty of others, however. . . .'

'What about Hari's son, Ali?'

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Jali had paused for a moment before saying this, and Lal Mehta, making a grimace, paused before answering. 'That wretched creature!' he muttered.

'I saw him this afternoon on the terrace.'

Lal Mehta looked surprised.

'He was talking to two young men of about his own age. They looked — very different.'

'Can you describe them?'

Jali did so.

Lal Mehta frowned and made a little sound of displeasure. 'Those must have been Makh Khan's sons. But why have they come down from the north again? I should like to know that.'

There was a silence, then Jali said: 'I hear that Princess Lalita got away quite successfully.'

The other smiled. 'Oh yes! And now she's happily married to young Ali Beg, and all her troubles are over. But . . .' He paused and became thoughtful again. 'I don't like the return of those two young men. And why were they with Ali, whom they must despise? You see,' and he swung round to face Jali squarely, 'no one in the world has a bigger grudge against Hari than they. When their sister was engaged to Daniyal, and Daniyal seemed destined for the Throne, they made sure they had brilliant careers before them. But now . . .'

At this moment Hari's voice came ringing down the table. 'Fill up your glasses, everyone! This is to Ali Beg and his bride! Long may they live and prosper!'

'Hurrah! Bravo! Three cheers for Princess Lalita!' shouted the young man on Jali's left. 'Here's to the girl who . . .'

Someone clapped a hand over his mouth, but it was clear that everybody could guess what the suppressed words were, and the toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

By this time everyone — even Lal Mehta — was slightly the worse for liquor, and Jali, who had decided to give himself up to the spirit of the party, passed the remaining hours of the night in a delicious, golden haze.

The sun was just rising as the last guest made his departure. After waving to him from the doorstep, Hari stretched himself like a cat in the warm light, yawned, and rubbed his eyes. 'I'm not in the least sleepy,' he said to Jali. 'Are you?'

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‘Not in the least.’

‘Then let’s go into the garden.’ And linking his arm through his nephew’s, he drew him back into the house. ‘Let’s enjoy the morning while it’s fresh.’

At the end of the garden, which was green with freshly-watered grass and shady trees, there stood a summer-house, in a corner of which a carpet had been spread. Hari gave another great yawn, threw himself down on a heap of cushions, and said: ‘Well, I hope you were not bored. The young man on your right, Prince Dattu Singh, is not such a fool as he pretends to be. Did you discover that?’

‘Yes,’ replied Jali untruthfully, and was about to turn the conversation on to Lal Mehta when a look of comic dismay appeared upon Hari’s face, and, looking round, he saw the major-domo advancing towards them over the lawn and bearing in front of him a large, golden tray piled high with letters.

‘Really, my good Balaji!’ cried Hari with a groan, ‘do you want to kill me outright? Have I slept? have I breakfasted? No! And yet . . . Take them away, I say! Take them away! I refuse to look at anything until after my bath.’ And to Jali he went on, ‘Every day it’s the same thing! But I never let my secretaries touch my letters until I have looked them over myself. And I’ll tell you why! Only last week my friend Pertab Rao . . .’ And he told a story to which Jali failed completely to attend. The young man was burning to broach the question of his mother’s arrival, and as soon as it was possible he drew her letter from his pocket, and asked Hari as politely as he could whether there had not been some mistake about dates.

After defending himself for some minutes in a flustered way Hari admitted an error. Indeed, there was nothing else he could do, but any annoyance that Jali might have felt (for it was evident that Hari had been very careless) was prevented by the disappointment which the other now manifested. ‘Four weeks more to wait!’ he kept repeating, ‘O Rama, Rama! another four weeks!’

Jali’s eyes were resting upon him thoughtfully, and in these moments the young man realized that he would have found it impossible to forgive Hari had he not given these evidences of chagrin. ‘How widely one love differs from another!’ he said within himself.

In the last few minutes the atmosphere in the summer-house had



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completely changed. A look of reminiscent sadness, a somewhat puzzled look, had come into Hari's face, and when he began to speak again, his voice was low and hesitating. 'It's very difficult to see into the future . . .' Lifting his eyes, he gave Jali a swift glance, and then turned his head away. 'But all the same, one ought to, I suppose. I mean . . . I mean we have to consider what your mother's life is going to be.'

It was clear that he was forcing himself to this from a painful sense of duty. Equally embarrassed, but sympathetic, Jali responded as best he could. And so for a while the two exchanged fragmentary sentences, which, if they did little to illuminate the future did at least bear testimony to friendly feeling. And yet to Jali the conversation was not particularly reassuring. He was quite taken aback, for instance, when Hari said: 'I think it will please your mother to hear that I've joined the Din Ilahi. After all, that's practically the same thing as becoming a Christian; and it also makes my position with Akbar stronger than ever.' And again, speaking of his political future, he said: 'Your mother will be glad to have me continue on my present lines, I feel sure. I can see her spending a good deal of her time in Agra, and quite enjoying the life here.'

With how much confidence did Hari make these statements? Had life in this unreal world already blunted his sense of reality? And his finer perceptions? No; it was more likely that he was ignoring them by a deliberate act of the will. His next speech had a quality so charming that the young man's bewilderment became complete.

'Listen!' he said, leaning forward, his face alight with eagerness. 'I have a little surprise for your mother. She's bound to arrive rather tired by her journey — not much inclined for the heat and bustle of Agra. So the other day it occurred to me: Why not put her up in the Pavilion in the Old Hunting Grounds? You remember the place? It's where Gokal was living at the time of the Durbar — when you came here for the first time. I went and examined the house about a week ago. It was horribly dusty and dirty and needed a few repairs, but all that was soon remedied. In fact the place is now ready for her — and I want you to come and see it.'

It was not until late in the afternoon that they set out. In the interval Jali had tried to get some sleep, but excitement at the thought of returning to Hawa Ghar had kept him wide-awake. Besides, he was troubled by the impossibility of persuading Hari to

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leave Agra. His mother would have been able to do it, but no one else could.

As he rode along in the soft, dusty afternoon light, his thoughts travelled back into the past, and the prospect of seeing the Pavilion again both attracted and repelled him. He remembered the furtive, pleasurable agitation with which he had gone to his first meetings with Gunevati in the tangled undergrowth; he remembered their long confabulations beside the little ruined temple, and the monkeys dozing in the fig tree . . . How hot and still the afternoons were in those days!

Presently they had left the town behind and were approaching the woods by the narrow, deserted road that he knew so well. It was quite unchanged. This road, and the little gate into the grounds, and the pathway winding along under the trees — all were strangely familiar — more familiar than anything else in Agra.

Where the path skirted the lake he looked at Hari, wondering what he was thinking, what he was recollecting — whether, for instance, he was remembering how the innumerable frogs (there were none here now) used to jump into the water as one approached. Everything, except the frogs, was the same. The Pavilion was exactly the same — silver-grey in colour, and no less lovely than the picture his memory had preserved.

For a moment they both halted at the edge of the clearing. Then Hari hurried forward, ran up the grey, stone stairs, crossed the terrace, and went indoors, eager to see if his last orders had been properly carried out. Slowly, Jali followed him, but instead of going in he walked along to the end of the terrace and there stood still, looking out at the woods and the lake. Beneath him the oblong sheet of water lay serene, reflecting the motionless trees and the evening sky. It lay still in a serenity that had always seemed to him to have mystical significance, and thoughts of his father came into his mind. 'I understand him now,' he said to himself. 'I feel that some part of him lives in me.'

The sound of someone coming out of the Pavilion made him turn his head.

'Come along,' called Hari. 'I want to show you round.' He was looking very pleased — with all the self-satisfaction of a child, eager to show how clever it has been.

Jali followed him in. The little house had been completely restored to its former freshness and charm. Nearly everything was

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new, and yet it seemed to belong to the place. The rooms looked just as they had looked in the old days. There were even flowers in their accustomed places — the flowers that his mother was especially fond of.

Hari led him from room to room and finally took him into the kitchen-house at the back. Here, too, everything had been thought of, nothing overlooked.

Coming out on to the terrace again, they sat down on the steps, and Jali was conscious, more strongly than ever before, of a bond of sympathy between them. From this he drew encouragement. The future no longer appeared to him so difficult, so hopeless. No! the Guru was right: there were no difficulties that could not be overcome if men and women would only look to the bond of their common humanity. If they looked deep enough, they would always find it.

Presently, when Hari broke the silence to talk about the arrival of Sita at the Pavilion, he was able to join him in the making of small, everyday plans without any sense of constraint or unreality. The minutes slid by, the light faded out of sky and lake, the peace of evening deepened. How deeply still it was! Not a sound anywhere except from the horses, which, tied up beneath the terrace, were stamping and shaking their heads to keep off the flies.

'Well!' said Hari at last, 'I suppose we ought to be going back'. He began to get up, but at that moment there was a commotion below and all at once Jali's horse was to be seen cantering away down the path towards the trees.

The young man sprang to his feet: 'What the devil has taken it! It must have snapped the reins.'

'Bitten by a horse-fly, I expect.'

For a minute they stood listening to see if the sound of cantering would stop. It did.

'That's all right!' Hari smiled. 'If you go up to her quietly, she'll let you catch her. But go quietly. Give her time.'

Jali went down the steps and moved gently along the path. The other horse looked at him with ears laid back as he passed. At the first bend in the path he saw his mare standing still about fifty yards off. Calling gently, he approached step by step. She let him come up to within a few paces of her, then shook her head and moved irresolutely away. This happened several times, until at last he desisted and stood still. A sudden uneasiness had taken hold of him. The dead silence seemed ominous, the place seemed dangerous,

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and Mabun's words about Hari's enemies came back into his mind.

Abruptly he turned and hurried back, looking into the bushes right and left as he went. When the Pavilion came in sight everything seemed the same. Hari's horse was still standing there, and if Hari himself was not visible, that must be because he had sat down again. But when the young man reached the foot of the steps he came to a sudden halt. Hari was sprawling flat on his back in a position that was terribly unnatural. With a cry he darted up to him. Hari's eyes were open and staring sightlessly; his lips were drawn back from his teeth. A thin trickle of blood was running down from one step to the next, and it seemed to be coming from behind Hari's back. He slipped his hand in between the body and the stone and felt warm blood oozing out. Hari had been stabbed in the back and was dead.

Jali began to tremble in all his limbs. 'He died without knowing it,' he told himself. 'He died without knowing it.'

But Hari had had a few seconds in which to become aware that he had met his death. 'Poor Sita!' he cried out in his heart. 'Poor Sita — my darling! But perhaps this is really the best . . . less pain in the end. O life, what a business! But I didn't want this. No, it came to me. I didn't want it.'

JALI's first thought, after Hari's death, was to make an attempt to join his mother. But, when he spoke to Mabun Das about it, the latter stared at him for a minute in silence, then shook his head. 'If I were you,' he said quietly, 'I should go at once to Daulatpur.'

The tone of his voice no less than his words caused Jali to stare back in surprise.

'This is the position,' Mabun went on. 'Rajah Bhoj and the Ranee are on their way to the Sesodia, with whom they will stay for about a month, and according to a secret report which has just come in, Moti Singh is already beginning to make the most of this opportunity.'

'You mean,' cried Jali, 'that he is going to attack Mohan and the Guru?'

'Yes. But Mohan left Daulatpur a week ago to meet Princess Damayanti on her homeward journey. I don't suppose he would have gone if he had known that his brother was likely to be away too. As things now stand Moti Singh has no one to hold him in check, and the Guru's position . . .'

'He'll have him murdered!' exclaimed Jali, springing to his feet. Mabun Das made no reply.

'For God's sake!' the young man exclaimed with violence. 'Can't you do anything?'

'In Daulatpur,' returned Mabun Das slowly, 'there is very little I can do. After all,' — his voice was full of sadness — 'I did all I could for Hari, and that was here in Agra, where I have some power.'

'Then what am I to do?'

Mabun drew a deep breath. 'Go to Daulatpur. Tell your friend the Guru what I have said. Tell him that . . .' He looked away, frowning and drumming on the table with his fingers. 'I hardly know what to advise.'

Jali sat down again. 'I have a suggestion.'

'Yes?'

'I shall try to persuade the Guru to come to Vidyapur with my mother and me.' His eyes were shining with excitement as he spoke.

'That would be excellent, but . . .'

'I shall suggest that he should leave Daulatpur at once, come back to Agra with me, and wait here until . . .'

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‘No. Preferably not in Agra.’

‘Then in some village near by, where he will be safe. And as soon as my mother and Gokal arrive we will all go together to Vidyapur.’

Mabun nodded slowly and reflectively; then, suddenly becoming brisk and cheerful again, ‘Arrange it, by all means,’ he said, ‘if you can.’

On that same evening Jali rode out of Agra. His thoughts were fastened upon the future, which had now assumed a quite different complexion in his mind. But everything depended upon his persuading the Guru to agree. His chances, he fancied, were not too bad, for although careless of his personal safety the Guru was not reckless; and surely he would give some importance to the entreaties of a friend?

All through the night the young man continued his ride. High in the sky a crescent moon threw down a hard, cold light. The road was shining with wet, for the rains had come at last, and the air, which for the last few days had been intolerably heavy and dusty, was now clean and cool.

Little by little a happier vision of things unfolded itself before Jali’s eyes. Even the hour that he most dreaded, the hour in which he would have to break the news of Hari’s death to his mother, became less dreadful in the light of his new hopes. For he had unlimited confidence in the Guru’s power to comfort and sustain.

Dawn broke with a flood of golden light, the rain held off, and all that day he pushed forward with scarcely a halt, for his anxiety to reach the Guru was increasing every hour. It was no later than noon on the second day that he arrived at Daulatpur. He rode into the town in the midst of a drenching rain-storm and made straight for the house of one, Garladinnu Ram, a Pundit, who was an acquaintance of Mabun’s. The house was found not without difficulty—a small, neat house in a small, neat street. He knocked at the door, and on presenting his letter was admitted at once, although the Pundit was out.

By the time he had changed his clothes the rain had stopped and he hurried into the street to obtain news of the Guru. Almost anyone, he thought, would be able to inform him, for the Guru was such a well-known figure that his whereabouts was widely known.

In a few minutes he happened upon the stall of Lakshmi’s friend

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the fruit-seller, and at once the little man ran out with a smiling face, bowing and chattering effusively. How glad he was to see the young Maharajah again. He trusted that the wine of good health was coursing through his veins, and the sun of prosperity lighting his footsteps. Did he chance to have news of the divinely-born mistress of the State? It seemed years since his thrice-blessed benefactress had gone away.

Jali shook his head, explaining that he was just arrived from Agra, and asked how things were going in Daulatpur.

The fruit-seller threw up his hands. 'Maharajah! For months things have been going from bad to worse. Look at my stall! There is not a thing you see for which I do not have to pay a double price. The low-born scum of the fields refuse to work. There is no man so mean or vile but that he does not consider himself my equal. We of the banya class — although we are nothing to a Prince of the Earth like your noble self — still we have our rights. And how shall we live if those hordes of savages . . .'

'You mean the peasants?'

'I mean all those who beside me are dogs. Our noble Rajah has always been too kind to them. He is too lofty to understand. But Moti Singh understands. And our Rajah in his wisdom has left authority in the hands of Moti Singh.'

It was time, Jali felt, to speak plainly. 'I am a friend of the Guru's,' he said with some coldness. 'Can you tell me where I should be likely to find him?'

The other stared. 'Are you not staying at the Palace, My Lord?' 'No.'

The man's eyes, becoming shifty, showed that he didn't know what to make of this. 'I think the Guru is in the Palace.'

'In the Palace! But the Rajah and Ranee are away! What is he doing there?'

'That I cannot tell you,' was the reply, and the words were spoken almost rudely. But the next moment the man's manner changed again. After all, it would be safer to remain polite. 'O Maharajah!' he cried. 'See! the sun is shining straight on to my beautiful mangoes. I must move them. Excuse your unworthy servant. Excuse! Excuse!' And he bowed himself away.

Jali felt a small, sharp stab of fear. After making one or two more unsuccessful inquiries he walked quickly back, hoping to find that his host had returned. This was so. He was ushered into a comfortable

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room, full of books, and furnished with careful taste; and the Pundit was there to receive him.

Garladinnu Ram was a tall, lean, scholastic-looking man of about fifty-five, and Jali now remembered having seen him once at a party of Lakshmi's.

'You are welcome, Rajah Jali,' he pronounced with prim formality. 'As a friend of our Ranee's as well as of Mabun Dās's, you are doubly welcome.'

Impatient as he was to ask questions, Jali decided to proceed very warily. In the first place, his host's manners told him that ceremony must not be waived; and then his encounter with the vegetable-seller had reminded him that not everyone in Daulatpur was of his own way of thinking.

'My house,' Garladinnu Ram went on, 'is very unpretentious, as you have already discovered. Your last sojourn in this town was spent under a much loftier roof-tree. But the absence of our revered Rajah and Ranee is not — to me at least — an unmixed calamity, since it secures me the honour of this visit.'

Here he paused, and then, in a slightly different tone, went on: 'Upon shoulders as youthful as yours, Rajah, the responsibilities of your position must weigh rather heavily. May I say that our Ruler here is a pattern' — he smiled, watching Jali narrowly — 'an almost perfect pattern of what a Ruler should be? — Perhaps you wonder why I insert even the smallest qualification. Well, I must confess that I am a progressive! In spite of my years' — and he stroked his smooth, pasty cheeks with smiling coyness — 'I am still young enough to welcome the new, if — as is *sometimes* the case — it happens to be good.'

They were now both sitting down. Tea and sweetmeats had been brought in, and while peering over the tray with short-sighted eyes, the Pundit continued his discourse. 'By most of my colleagues and contemporaries I am afraid I appear — what shall I say? — not quite respectable!' Here he lay back, rubbing his hands and chuckling with an air of intimate amusement. 'But public opinion is not one of the things of which I stand in awe. Sufficient for me is the understanding of one or two kindred spirits — and, if I may say so without boasting, the sympathy and confidence of the young. — Well, Rajah, there stands the man before you distinct in every line! And let me add in conclusion that for as long as you care to stay here I and my house are at your disposal.'



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After replying to this with a suitable profusion of thanks, Jali started upon a circuitous approach to his subject. 'I can hardly expect,' he said, 'to find many of my old friends in town at this season. Ranee Devi, for instance, is, I believe, away?'

'Ah yes! too sad, too sad! You must have met Randhir often at the Palace. And now — never again! A brave man answering the call of duty. Well! he was a Rajput. Let that be his epitaph!'

Jali inclined his head and went on: 'Ranee Maya, too, I believe . . .'

'No! She is still in Daulatpur. And should you care to bring the dear Ranee to this house she will be, as ever, welcome. The last time she was here . . .'

 And there followed an anecdote.

When it was over, and they had both laughed sufficiently, Jali went on: 'I shall certainly call on Ranee Maya. And then, too, I was thinking of riding out to the dell one of these days to see the Guru who' — he saw the Pundit's face change — 'who was so often at the Palace — and is probably a friend of yours, too?'

Taking a deep breath, Garladinnu Ram compressed his lips and wrinkled his forehead. 'The answer, my dear Rajah, is yes and no,' he replied with deliberation. 'I respect the Guru as a man of strong convictions; I like him, of course, personally — who does not? — but . . .' He lifted his chin slowly, shook his head, and smiled at Jali with narrowed eyes. 'Well, a lot has happened since you left the Palace. All is not well in the State of Daulatpur. No, I regret to say, all is not well, and the person most responsible for our troubles is — the Guru!'

Jali made an inquiring murmur.

'This evening, when we have more time, I will give you an analysis of the situation. Let it suffice if I say now that the Guru is actually in prison.'

'In prison?'

'Yes. Rajah Bhoj is, as you know, away. But fortunately we have in our Chancellor a man of great ability and strong character. He has the situation well in hand.'

For a few moments Jali felt unable to speak; then, controlling his voice with difficulty, he brought out, 'But what excuse — I mean what reason — had Moti Singh for. . . ?'

'The case is peculiar. It might be said that the Guru has imprisoned himself. A few days ago three revolutionaries were — quite rightly — put under lock and key for inciting to riot. The Guru, after inquiring what they had said and done, informed Moti Singh

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that he intended to imitate them; and he did so. Moti Singh had no choice but to serve him with the same punishment.'

'How long ago was that?' stammered Jali. 'And is it a very bad prison? You know, he is old and has a weak heart.'

The Pundit was beginning to eye Jali with a certain suspicion. 'Your concern for your friend does you credit, my dear Rajah, but it is only the Guru's contumacy that keeps him where he is. He has only to promise to mend his ways in order to be released. Moreover, I am glad to be able to tell you that the Palace prison, which was somewhat old and out of date, has recently been reconstructed. That we owe to our Ranee. One of her first acts on coming to Daulatpur as a bride was to visit the prisoners and the sick; and on coming up from the prison under the Palace she turned to her husband and said: "Everything else is so perfect here! we mustn't let our lovely Palace have feet of clay." Charming, don't you think? And so exactly like her.'

'Ranee Lakshmi is wonderful,' assented Jali, grinding his teeth.

'She is beloved by high and low,' the Pundit went on. 'And I, as a man of letters, am able to appreciate her from a rather exceptional angle.'

'Ah yes!' said Jali.

Garladinnu Ram settled himself down more comfortably against his cushions. 'I will explain what I mean. Rajah Bhoj has a culture which no one can fail to respect; he is a fine Ruler, shrewd, cautious, and just, besides being the most amiable of men, but . . .' The Pundit's eyes narrowed and with finger and thumb he plucked an invisible thread out of the air. 'But in matters of literature and art one turns instinctively to the Ranee. What delicacy of discrimination! What finesse! Hers — if I may use an apparent contradiction in terms — is a natural connoisseurship!'

'Yes,' said Jali. 'Yes.'

The Pundit smiled to himself reflectively. He had a smile that showed him to be enjoying a subtle amusement which he scarcely knew how to share. 'Such a witty woman, too!' he said. 'I have a little story about her which I don't tell to everyone, but . . .'

Again Jali's attention failed, but, after laughing heartily, he rose, and two minutes later was hurrying down the street.

'I must go to Moti Singh,' he was thinking. 'There is nothing else to do.'

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No! although there were a dozen houses at which he could call, certain of still receiving a polite reception, he felt equally certain that not one of his former friends would lift a finger to help him. He knew where he stood; Lakshmi's word had gone forth; neither he nor his aim would commend themselves. Had he, however, been able to think of a single person likely to lend him support he would have disregarded personal feelings and hurried to that door. But there was no one. It was curious how different Daulatpur had become from the place that he had known before.

Feeling something of an outcast, he approached the Palace gate. The big, heavy door, usually open at this hour, was closed. Two guards stood outside it, and a few people were loitering on the other side of the narrow way. Putting on an air of self-assurance, he walked up to one of the guards and inquired how admittance was to be obtained. The man answered that the Rajah and Ranee were away and that no one could enter unless he had special business with the Chancellor.

'But I have,' said Jali.

The other looked at him doubtfully, then rapped with the hilt of his sword on a panel of the door. The panel opened, and Jali saw the face of a porter who was not unfamiliar to him.

Giving the man a nod and a smile, he said: 'I shall be glad if you will let me in. I want to see the Chancellor.'

The porter's face took on a stony expression. 'His Excellency is away.'

'Then I will come in and wait.'

'I am under orders to admit no one.'

Noticing that no title of respect was given him, Jali said: 'But you know who I am, and . . .'

Before he had finished the sentence the panel was slammed in his face.

Hot with anger, he turned to the guard. 'I am the Rajah of Vidyapur, who was recently the Maharajah's guest.'

The guard looked disconcerted. Not knowing what to reply, he made a stiff military salute.

'Knock again!' said Jali.

He knocked and Jali waited, but the panel did not open, and after a minute the young man walked away.

He moved down the hot, steamy alley in a state of rage and perplexity. Had the porter received special orders not to admit him?

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It looked like it. But could Moti Singh be aware that he had come to Daulatpur? Yes, why not? for he had spies everywhere.

After turning into another street he stepped up to a water-carrier and asked what the group outside the Palace door were waiting for.

'For the Guru, I expect.'

'Is he coming out then? What do they want with him?' A suspicious and sullen look was the reply.

'Listen!' said Jali, 'I am a stranger here. You can speak to me without fear.'

'You saw with your own eyes what they had in their hands,' said the water-carrier.

'They had sticks.'

'Yes.'

'But . . .' Jali was aghast.

'They are banyas!' And the man spat and went on.

Moving into the shade of an arch, Jali paused to take thought.

The world was assuming a very unpleasant aspect. But as his sense of loneliness and frustration increased an answering determination to persevere rose to meet it. If it was impossible to force a way into the presence of Moti Singh, it might still be within his power to obtain access to the Guru.

With this idea he retraced his steps as far as the wall of the Palace, and then began to skirt along its base. The great cliff of masonry, still wet from the recent rain, glistened like the hide of an ancient leviathan. The alley that ran along under it was one of the most squalid in the town. Arriving at the prison entrance, he found there another group of loiterers, also armed with sticks, and these men were chattering with the guards, who showed signs of being drunk. Jali mingled with the crowd, and presently, edging up to the chief guard, attempted to gain his ear. It was his intention to bribe him, but the man was noisy and fuddled with drink, and when Jali tried to slip money into his hand, he did not even notice it. At last, ignoring those who stood by, the young man spoke out plainly and showed the gold in his palm. It was a measure of desperation, for the crowd and the guards were exchanging savage jokes about the Guru and the reception he would get, should he be released. After looking at the money with covetous eyes and hesitating for a minute, the man went into a violent rage; he denounced Jali as a traitor, and shouted that not for all the wealth of India would he admit him.

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The crowd applauded, and Jali found himself in the centre of a jeering circle.

'You want to get in to the Guru, do you?' someone cried out. 'Well, that's easy enough! The old woman got in.'

There was a general laugh. Jali looked round at the fat, oily faces of these well-to-do townsmen and hated them from the bottom of his heart.

'Yes, do as the old woman did!' said another with a wink and a grin. 'She managed all right!'

A cold anger possessed Jali, and in a quiet voice he asked: 'Well! and what did she do?'

'She smacked his face!' several voices shouted simultaneously, and more than one finger was pointed at the guard, who, now purple with rage, thrust his head forward, challenging Jali with a murderous look.

Jali deliberately smacked the man's face.

A howl went up. The next instant Jali was striking out at half a dozen guards, who, having closed in on him, soon had him on the ground. But a moment later he was picked up, dragged inside the prison gates, and hurried along a stone corridor. Then a door was unlocked and he was hurled down some steep steps into a fetid darkness.

RETURNING to consciousness, the young man became aware that he was in great pain. For a while pain occupied his whole field; he was without memory or any desire to recollect. Then quite suddenly memory came back, and brought him to a vague apprehension of his present situation. Two persons, seated, apparently, on the steep flight of steps, were supporting him and saving him from contact with the sharp angles of stone. One of them was the Guru, for upon his muttering some question, the Guru's voice sounded close to his ear. He was unable to move his head without increasing his pain, but, casting his eyes round, he made out that this dungeon was a deep, square pit without light excepting the little that came in from somewhere high above. Neither the top nor the bottom of the dungeon could he see. The bottom was lost in darkness, but he could hear some other people talking in an undertone on the steps a little way beneath him.

Presently he became aware that it was not pain alone that he was suffering from: he was struggling against suffocation.

'More air!' he gasped. 'I can't breathe.'

Again the Guru's voice answered him. It was gentle and reassuring, and the hand which had been fanning his face began to move faster. 'The air is bad, I know, but very soon you will get accustomed to it. Just continue to breathe evenly, and make no effort of any kind.'

Jali tried to obey. The fear of death by suffocation had taken so terrible a hold on him that for a time he became unaware of his pain. Then suddenly, in a panic, he tried to sit up, and this movement caused him such agony that again he lost consciousness.

His next return to awareness of his surroundings was only partial, and there followed a period which seemed to him to be of immense length, although it was in itself timeless. Pain had taken him outside time — outside such time at least as is susceptible of measurement. It imposed a kind of ecstasy, and this ecstasy yielded no definable content when in after days he attempted to recollect it. But he did remember afterwards, to his surprise, that in this period he had possessed — at intervals at least — self-consciousness, a very intense self-consciousness. Moreover, unless his mind was playing

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him tricks, that self-consciousness had been *pure* — aware of nothing at all except itself.

The time came, however, when he had recovered his ordinary faculties sufficiently to put questions to the Guru and understand his replies. He learnt that the jailer would certainly come back soon — at daybreak, and daybreak apparently was not far off. And, after that, release would only be a question of a few hours. Why this should be so Jali did not make the effort to comprehend; it sufficed him that the Guru had said it.

And so time went by. It was immeasurable, but it went by.

Now and then something happened to make a distinguishing mark upon that long road of darkness. Once, when he complained that his position on the steps was uncomfortable, it was explained to him that the rains had covered the bottom of the dungeon with water. 'And saved our lives,' the Guru added, 'for by covering all the dirt on the floor it purified the air. And it has also cooled the air considerably. Besides, there is one place where the rain trickles in so that we are able to catch it, and that gives us enough to drink.'

'How long have you been here?' Jali asked.

'Three days.'

'And how long have I been here?'

The Guru said: 'I can't tell exactly. But the jailer will certainly be arriving very soon now.'

After that Jali fell into a prolonged stupor which was filled with terrible dreams. He woke from it to greater lucidity than he had yet possessed, for the headache that had been maddening him had diminished. But now came a gradual realization that the Guru's prediction had not been fulfilled. He had been far more than twenty-four hours in this place. Of that he had no longer any doubt.

'Guru!' he said.

'Yes, my son?'

But he found he could not speak.

The Guru, however, understood. He admitted that more than forty-eight hours had elapsed since the last opening of the dungeon door. 'But it is impossible that they should have forgotten us,' he said. 'And equally impossible that they should intend us to die. Take courage! Keep up your heart! We shall emerge alive.'

Jali was silent. A great fear of death had seized him. His pains were less, but he took this as a bad sign, for he also felt weaker.

'Listen!' the Guru went on, and he explained again that his

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imprisonment was in a sense voluntary. Moti Singh had ordered that he should be asked every twelve hours whether he had not had enough. 'Some mistake has occurred,' he insisted. 'And it will soon be discovered. For the first three days the jailer came regularly, and I am sure he will soon come again. When he does I will at once obtain my own release, and then — well, you will see!' And, as Jali remained silent, he continued: 'Remember this: When they threw you in here they had no idea who you were. As soon as they find out they will be dismayed. It can't be Moti Singh's intention that you should remain here. He over-reached himself in imprisoning me, and now — through the fault of his drunken guards — his mistake has become much worse. He will do everything in his power to repair it.'

The sound of his voice was comforting, but the young man felt himself to be growing very weak. He asked what his injuries were.

'You have a bad bruise on the head — but the skull is not fractured. Your arm, too, is broken.'

'And my shoulder?'

'I'm afraid your shoulder is dislocated. Your injuries, I know, are very painful, but they are not really serious. You have had fever; but now you are better. You are not going to die.'

Jali thought differently, and in silence he marvelled at what had happened to him. It seemed to him to be outside the proper course of nature. Death was coming in such untimely fashion! He felt that God had certainly not intended this, and that somehow a mistake was being made.

But these reflections were only transitory; they suddenly gave place to resignation.

A new and dreadful stench was now filling the dungeon and he knew it for what it was — the smell of a putrefying body. The old woman whose behaviour he had imitated had died not long after his arrival. This he had already learnt, for he had heard her son weeping. 'Death comes to all,' he thought, and he no longer rebelled. He could no longer find strange anything that might happen to him.

Vague memories of Hari floated into his mind. All those whom he had known and who were now dead came trooping out of the past. One or two he had quite forgotten and his remembrance of them surprised him. 'Already,' he thought, 'I am drifting into that other company.'



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But the figure that returned again and again was Hari's, and suddenly he knew why. Collecting his strength to speak distinctly, he told the Guru that the letter which Hari had charged him to give his mother was among his belongings in the house of Garladinnu Ram.

'Yes, my son,' answered the Guru with gentleness, 'if you die, it shall be found and given to her. But you will not die.'

Of his mother, of Damayanti, and of Savitri, he tried not to think, because the thought of them gave him too much pain; but in his confusion of mind he counted his father as already dead and saw him in the company towards which he was moving.

Time went by. At intervals he came to himself to wonder how much had gone by. But there was now no measuring of time, and it ceased to concern him. Most of the things that used to concern him seemed to him now inessential; in fact he could not see why people busied themselves with such things. One thing only was of sovereign importance — and had been of sovereign importance from the moment that he had woken up to find himself in this place — and that was his close contact with the Guru. That had made everything bearable, seemed to explain everything, although he did not know what the explanation was. He was unable — he did not attempt — to think of himself without this communion.

And still time went on, but now he was hardly inside its flow at all. Soon fever carried him off into wild fantasies, from which he escaped for only a few moments now and then. But whenever he escaped it was into a singularly deep and remote self-consciousness, which he and the Guru and the whole world were sharing.

AFTER three days and nights of imprisonment Jali was released, and his companions with him. That they had not all obtained their release before was due, as the Guru had supposed, to a mistake. Indeed, there had been blunders and accidents in disastrous succession. The prison guards had been able to keep up their drunken carouse for three days because it chanced that two of their superior officers were ill. The next in command was celebrating his wedding and had leave of absence. And so it went on, until one reached Moti Singh himself. The young ruler of a neighbouring State had invited him to attend his coming-of-age celebrations, and the temptation to show himself off in such a distinguished assembly had been too much for Moti Singh.

On his return one blow after another fell upon him. He discovered, first, that the Guru was still in prison, next that he had been joined there by a young man of good birth, and finally that this young man was none other than Prince Jali, now Rajah of Vidyapur. 'My career is ended!' he said to himself. But he hurried to do what he could to repair the disaster.

Jali and the Guru, who by this time had both come very near to death, were at once freed, lodged in the Palace, and placed under the care of the Court Physician. Day and night Moti Singh watched anxiously over them, and when they were judged to be out of danger no one was more thankful than he. In the meantime he had sent off messages of skilful self-exculpation to Bhoj and to his friends in Agra. It was Mabun Das that he most feared — and rightly. Mabun, quick to learn what had happened, denounced Moti Singh in the strongest terms to Akbar; and very soon a small body of cavalry was on its way to Daulatpur with orders to arrest Moti Singh and bring him before the Emperor.

As soon as Jali and the Guru were well enough to be moved they were carried in palanquins up to Hawa Ghar. News of Moti Singh's arrest reached them a few days later, and with it there came a letter from Mabun Das which made it clear that Moti Singh would never return to Daulatpur. Jali's heart was filled with joy, for the man had been Bhoj's evil genius, and with his disappearance the whole aspect of things was changed. Troubles and disturbances

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no doubt would still arise, but the crisis was over, and victory had gone to the Guru.

During these early days of his convalescence Jali was possessed by a happiness which he could not understand. It seemed to him somewhat out of place, and he would have been ashamed of it, had not the same spirit been manifest in the Guru. The latter had suffered surprisingly little from his recent ordeal — or so at least it seemed. Supporting himself upon a stick — for his lameness had certainly increased — he would come hobbling into Jali's room, lower himself cautiously down by the bedside, and, sharing his companion's careless gaiety, while away the time with humorous comments on their past experiences and cheerful forecasts of the future.

'Poor old Bhoj!' exclaimed Jali more than once. 'What will he do without his Moti Singh!'

In the course of these talks the young man broached the subject of the Guru's accompanying him to Vidyapur, but the other, although he did not positively refuse, remained consistently evasive.

In a week or two Jali's strength had returned sufficiently to enable him to leave his bed and saunter down to the pool. The Guru was nearly always to be found there. More and more of his time did the old man spend on the seat in that corner where Damayanti had been sitting when Jali had looked down into the enclosure for the first time. And very often Savitri would be with him. The number of hours the Guru idled away with Savitri caused Jali some surprise; never before had he seen him content to take so much ease and leisure.

To the young man's great disappointment Damayanti's return had been postponed several times, and at last he began to fear that he might be obliged to go back to Agra without seeing her. The colour of his days was gradually changing, as the shadow of their approaching end advanced. Moreover, the future, looming up before him, demanded more and more insistently the thought which he was disinclined to give it.

Often, when talking with the Guru, a silence would descend upon him, and the latter, knowing what was in his mind, would mock gently at his doubts and despondencies.

'Why not invite Moti Singh to be your Chancellor?' he said one day. 'And you might at the same time approach Abul Fazl — with a view to appointing him Vizir.'

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'I feel half inclined to take that advice,' returned Jali reproachfully. 'After all, a Government must be efficient; and you yourself have pointed out that both those men are very efficient in their way.'

'Ah, but you must remember that you are going to build up a society in which there won't be any demand for the talents of people like that.'

Jali gave a sigh. 'It seems to me that every society is made up of types — nothing but types! If you turn a man into an official, a peasant, or a soldier, and keep his descendants, officials, peasants, or soldiers for several generations you get in the end . . .'

'That's quite true!' interrupted the Guru. 'But just as no one is pure person, so no one is pure type. The person always survives — living a hidden, subterranean life — which can be revived.'

But Jali would not give up his despondency. 'After having made people stupid,' he observed with gloom, 'society points triumphantly to that stupidity as a reason for preserving the present state of affairs.'

'That is why a new vision is needed. We must look through these veils to the essential greatness of human nature, and build on that. There is nothing else to build on. If someone tells me that men in the mass are selfish, lazy, and stupid, I am ready to grant him that. But I will add that they have all the opposite qualities as well. No one who knows the lives of simple men can fail to be astonished and to marvel. With what incredible fortitude do men bear up against long-drawn hardships and miseries! With what astonishing heroism and self-sacrifice they confront every pain and every danger! And how generous to one another they are! To deny these things is a sin, and to ignore them the sign of an ungenerous heart. Men are by nature adventurous, generous, and gentle. These are the natural graces of mankind.'

'My son,' continued the Guru with a light kindling in his eyes, 'never forget the saying: "The holy man and we are one in kind." Never insult your fellow-men by acting on their behalf as you would not act for yourself. Remember that, if there is an *elite*, you and your like do not belong to it — at least; not as far as you know.' He paused and gave a little laugh. 'Men will call you a fool and a fanatic, but you will be neither. That you *will* know.'

One afternoon, as he was riding back from a visit to a neighbouring village, Jali saw a man on horseback approaching Hawa Ghar.

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Recent rains had made the air wonderfully clear; the rider was still half a mile away when Jali recognized him and went with all speed to his encounter. The man, who had been one of Damayanti's attendants on her journey, informed him that she and Mohan would be reaching Daulatpur in the evening, and would come on to Hawa Ghar early the next day. He had a letter for the Guru, which Jali took from him, and then, wheeling round, galloped back to Hawa Ghar.

On reaching the house he dismounted, and feeling sure that the Guru was by the pool, hurried down the woodland path. Before he had taken many steps he heard Savitri's laughter ringing out in the distance, but after a minute it ceased, and as he drew near to the enclosure he wondered why all was so still. At the gate the sight that met his eyes caused him to halt in astonishment. For a few moments he forgot his errand and could only smile and stare. Savitri was standing in the centre of the pool. She was standing upon the broad breast of Vishnu — a thing she had never done before — and looking down into the god's face. Pensiveness had fallen upon her in the midst of her play and was holding her there fixed, with head bent, in an attitude of dreamy speculation. Her eyes questioned, but the god's eyes looked beyond her, and his countenance gave no answer.

It was not until she stirred that the Guru spoke. From his corner he said: 'Well, Savitri?'

'I can't tell,' she replied.

'Then you needn't worry. For if he minded you would certainly know it. Only, if I were you, I wouldn't often . . .'

She turned to meet his eyes, and shook her head. 'No, I shan't do it again — not for a long time.'

Neither she nor the Guru had yet caught sight of Jali, but as she began to make her slippery way back along the body of the god which was ankle-deep, she raised her head and nearly overbalanced. 'Oh, there you are! Did you see where I was?'

'Yes, I saw.' And Jali came in.

'Well, I have done what no one else has done: I have looked straight down into his face.'

She paused; she was evidently still a little frightened by what she had done.

Jali smiled reassuringly. 'Vishnu didn't mind. The Guru wouldn't have let you do it, if. . . '

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'No, that's true.' She took his outstretched hand and swung herself up out of the pool.

'This is for the Guru!' And he showed her the letter. 'I've just taken it from Chaman, who says that your father and mother will be back to-morrow — soon after mid-day.'

'To-morrow!' She gave a cry of delight, and, spinning round, rushed through the gate, and disappeared.

WHILE the Guru was reading the letter, Jali, lying outstretched upon the ground at his feet, looked up into the sky. The small clouds sailing by were coloured by the first flush of evening, a branch that hung across the corner of the enclosure swayed in the wind; now and then a leaf was shaken off and fluttered down on to the brick path or the water of the pool.

'Her father has died,' he heard the Guru say. 'But that, we knew, had to be; and his death was an easy one.'

The voice that spoke these words was gentle and low. Hardly did it alter the current of Jali's thoughts which were already with Damayanti.

'How thankful I am that they have had these weeks together!' The Guru drew in a long, deep breath. 'It has been a time of peace and understanding. The past has justified itself. She is left without self-reproach.'

Jali raised himself upon one elbow, and into his mind there came the thought that these days, which for him had been days of impatient eagerness, had been different — how different! — for her father and for her. And as he looked into the Guru's face he asked himself: 'What have these days been for him?'

The old man was staring straight before him, lost in meditation. If there was an answer in that kindly, wrinkled face Jali could not read it. Meaning and significance were there, but they were indecipherable. And it seemed to him that the real significance of the Guru's thoughts was hidden even from the Guru himself, for the thinker and his thoughts make a whole, which the thinker cannot place before his eyes. Another, contemplating the thinker, may speculate, and into his heart may come vague intimations of the pathos and beauty of human life — but beyond that all is mystery. 'He is a good man!' thought Jali, and for some reason that he could not understand his eyes filled with tears. Quickly he looked away.

The Guru continued to be silent, and after a while Jali glanced at him again and asked: 'What are you thinking about?'

The Guru stirred, and it was in the voice of one stepping out of a dream that he said: 'Let us talk a little about your future — I mean

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your coming life at Vidyapur. It makes me glad to think that your friend Gokal will certainly be there.'

A cloud passed over Jali's face. He was saying to himself that were he again to ask the Guru to accompany him home, he would probably meet again with an evasive reply. Was it possible that the Guru failed to realize what a difference even the briefest visit would make?

Abruptly he sat up, looked the Guru straight in the eyes, and said: 'Yes, Gokal is a very good friend to me. But he can't take the place that you would take, — if only I could persuade you to come.'

'Jali,' — and the Guru gave a gentle smile which softened the finality of his accent — 'I shall not be able to come.'

A silence followed these words. The wind rustled in the trees and a handful of leaves fluttered down on to the water. The young man inclined his head, but he could not repress a sigh.

Leaning forward, the Guru stretched out a hand and laid it on Jali's shoulder. 'Let us talk about your future,' he said again, his voice mild with entreaty. 'I have been thinking about it a great deal.'

His face was serene, but nothing could make away with the fact that there had descended upon them both a profound melancholy. It was like a presence in the little enclosure; it rested upon the water; it looked forth from the face of Vishnu.

Detaching his eyes from the Guru, Jali glanced round about him. Not without difficulty did he find his voice; he said: 'I don't understand . . . Damayanti will be here soon. I don't understand why I am so sad.' And then, his gaze returning to his companion's face, he murmured: 'You, too, are sad.'

For an instant the Guru seemed to have been taken off his guard, then he leaned back and gave himself a little shake. 'My child, we are only human. We can't think about time without sadness. But one mustn't take one's sadness too seriously.'

'Were you, then, thinking about time?'

'Yes. Time.'

Jali knit his brows. 'Perhaps I was, too.'

'Let us not look back into the past! For us, poor, human beings, it is better to look forward into the future. Our past is nothing to be proud of.'

'And the present?'

'My child!' — the Guru shook his head with a humorous solemnity,



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— 'one has to be very simple or very saintly to live in the present — and you are neither.'

Jali was silent. He smiled at the Guru's words, and would willingly have returned an answer in the same vein, but his spirit could not rise. He sat dumb. And once again melancholy crept into the enclosure and gathered about them.

But the old man was looking at him intently now; and Jali saw a gradual change come over his face. The Guru's eyes, grown deep and dark, seemed able to pierce the growing dusk and see right down into his heart — even past the veils of his own self-ignorance. But he had no wish to hide any corner of himself from that gaze, and he opened his eyes to it wide.

At length the Guru spoke.

'You are right,' he said softly, 'there is something in this hour to which we should yield.' And a little later, after their ears had listened to the rustling of the wind, and their eyes had wandered in the dusk, he said once more: 'This is the present. And eternity is with us now. We have but to yield. We have but to open the door.'

Jali said nothing, and was content not to understand. He knew only that something within him was loosened, and that his spirit went forth. With the Guru's it went forth into freedom — to mix in the black leafiness of the trees, and mount to the growing light of the stars, and sail in the dusky, placid air. And it looked down upon the sleeping god in the pool. In his mind there was a memory. He was reminded of something that had happened to him before. And as he returned to the solitude of himself, he found that he had moved, and was leaning his head against the Guru's knees, and held his hand, as he had done in the dungeon at Daulatpur.

'My son,' said the Guru, 'this is the heart of the mystery. We go forth, we meet, and in the meeting we are as one. At one also with all life.' He stopped, and then said beneath his breath: 'Turn your head and look across the pool! Do you see those two little shining eyes watching us?'

Jali turned. 'A squirrel!'

'Behind those eyes is a life hovering on the fringe of ours — a life that looks out at us and says: "You — who are you? What are you?" It cannot yet say: "What are we?" But we can say it, and in that is the greatness and melancholy of man's estate. Yes, for although we know that we are Spirit, and that all Spirit is one, yet by an

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unalterable rhythm of our being we swing out from the world of communion into the world of separated things.'

He stopped. The two little, green eyes had disappeared from their place by the water, a moment later they reappeared on the top of the wall, then vanished finally.

'How to hold fast?' murmured Jali. 'How — in the world of separation — to hold fast?'

'One must cling to the memory One must remember and one must act. The knowledge gained in communion, and ripened in solitude, must pour its life into the world through action. Thus only will you and the world about you live.'

Jali stared at the dark outline of Vishnu and was silent; and after a while the Guru said: 'Are you hiding your thoughts from me?'

In a muffled voice Jali answered: 'I am thinking of my father — of his retirement from the world.'

The other leaned forward, and Jali turned to meet his gaze.

'I am glad you have spoken of this,' said the Guru. 'From what you have told me already I know that you and your father are much alike. — My child, there are two kinds of withdrawal. If a man withdraws from the world in order to contemplate his feelings or his ideas in solitary self-absorption, then he is lost. But if his desire is to concentrate his powers and achieve his soul's unity, if his solitude is a place of purification, then that man is but obeying the rhythm of his being and his withdrawal is good. Into loneliness the spirit by its nature swings; and, as it is only in communion and action that man learns, so it is only in loneliness that he discovers what he has learnt. Nevertheless, from his solitude — yes, and from communion! — man must always return.'

'But must my father return to the life of the world? Must he return to that?'

'No, not to that. He has borne his burden, lived his life among men; and he knew when the hour of decision struck. Who shall say that in his loneliness he is not finding all that he sought — and more?'

At these words Jali breathed a sigh that was tremulous and deep. Falling back into his former position, he gazed dreamily into the dusk. The pool was now reflecting a pale light from the cloud-covered moon; against the sky's mild radiance the trees stood forth dark.

'Spiritual separation,' said the Guru, 'spiritual separation alone,

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is what the soul has to fear. Sometimes a man will lose himself in busy preoccupation with worldly things; sometimes he takes refuge in the private kingdom of his sensibilities; sometimes he holds himself remote in a stronghold of theories and ideas. But surely and inescapably the life of such a man will become empty of reality. The world, as an incubus, will tower over him, the self within him will turn into a ghost. And soon the incubus over him and the ghost within will whisper to one another the confession of their non-salvation.'

Jali shivered, and when he spoke his voice was low. 'That, too, I understand.'

'O my child!' said the Guru, and in his utterance there was a note of grief, 'which of us does not? Who is there who has not woken up from sleep to cry aloud in his agony: "Life is there! Happiness is there! If only I could get through to them!" But he cannot. He is wandering alone in the stony body of a great pyramid and he cannot get to the Centre. He cannot reach his fellow-men.'

'The Centre?' murmured Jali, and he knit his brows. The Guru's words had a meaning that he could not fully grasp. 'Must one reach the Centre?'

'One must. All communion is through the Centre. When the relation of man with man is not through the Centre, it corrupts and destroys itself. This you already know.'

Heavy was the silence that followed upon this speech. Again Jali drew himself away to peer through the dark at the outline of the man beside him. Quite unmistakably, to his quickened sense, some force had concentrated itself in that wasted body; some passion had gathered; and with caught-up breath he waited for what was to come. Suddenly the Guru rose to his feet. With a vigour that was unnatural to his enfeebled state he strode to the edge of the pool, and there stood erect looking up into the sky.

But all at once his head dropped down upon his breast and his arms crossed themselves in sorrow. 'Oh, that great host of the hiddenly desolate!' His voice was a cry of pain. 'Why must they hide themselves forever in their mock-life? Here in the world of truth is the glory of the morning and the evening, the beauty of companionship, and the grace of communion with God! Why do they live to fabricate something small?'

Half covering his face with his arm he began to walk up and down the path. For a minute or two this rapid movement continued,

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then, stopping short, he beckoned to Jali, who had already sprung up.

Holding the young man at arm's length, one hand on each shoulder: 'This is the sadness of the old,' he said, 'there is little — so little! — they can do to help those who come after them.'

All his quietude of manner had returned to him; and now he went on: 'But with you it will be well. Take no thought for small purposes and means. Think only of your decision, perpetually renewed, to live in the light of what you know.'

'What do I know?'

'You know that Spirit is the world's master. You know that you are not the slave of mechanical fate, but the master of divine destiny. You know that there is a divine meaning in the life of the world — in the life of men, of you, and of me.'

THE next day was sunny and fresh. Looking out of his window early, Jali saw Savitri come running on to the lawn. She glanced up, caught sight of him, and stopped. 'Savitri,' he called out, 'don't you think it would be nice if we rode out to the edge of the plateau to meet your mother?'

'Yes, lovely!'

'We'll start about noon.'

She nodded and ran on.

He spent the morning in the meeting-room with a score of peasants who found some of the points in Akbar's new edicts beyond their understanding. On that particular ground he was sure of himself, and this made an agreeable change, for on most of the matters that concerned them they knew more than he.

A little before noon he went up to his room to change his clothes. 'In less than two hours,' he thought, 'I shall be seeing her. Nothing can prevent that now. Even if a summons from my mother were to come immediately, I should still be seeing her.'

He had not quite finished his dressing when a confused noise arose from downstairs — a clatter of riding-boots, voices, laughter, and, above all, shrieks of joy from Savitri. 'By all the Gods!' he exclaimed, 'they must have come!' Scrambling into his tunic, he rushed down and found himself in the midst of a joyful company. Everyone was there — Mohan and Damayanti with Savitri, Rabindra, and the Guru.

Presently they all went into the veranda, and Rabindra fetched some palm-wine. Laying her hand lightly on Jali's injured arm, Damayanti drew him aside. 'Let me look at you!' she said. Her eyes examined his face gravely and affectionately; then, looking down, she asked: 'Oughtn't your arm to be in a sling?'

'Yes, perhaps. But I was in a hurry — how did you manage to get here so early? You must have started at dawn.'

'We did!' She laughed. 'We were in a hurry, too.'

They continued to stand there looking at one another, and the young man's heart expanded with happiness. No words were necessary. He stood there quiet, enjoying a happiness that asked for nothing more.

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Rabindra now came in with the palm-wine, which was, as Savitri observed, good and strong. 'I think,' said she dispassionately, 'that if I drink the whole of what I have here . . .'

'Savitri, God forbid!' exclaimed Mohan, and he made an attempt to get hold of her cup, which was certainly a large one.

But she twisted laughingly away. 'Why not? Let me try. It would be such fun to see what happened.'

While he was chasing her round the veranda the Guru moved into a corner and sat down. As he was sipping his wine and looking on with a smile, Jali and Damayanti simultaneously glanced across at him, and, the same thought coming to both of them, they quickly exchanged looks. The smile upon the old man's face was very beautiful — a veritable benediction.

After a minute they moved over to him, and for a while all three chatted together about this and that; but it mattered very little what was said, for their thoughts were meeting elsewhere. When he had finished his tussle with Savitri Mohan came up. 'Guru!' he said lightly, 'you are looking well, but . . .' and he puckered his forehead, 'but, surely, rather thin?'

The Guru gave a little laugh. 'Well, that's the effect of prison, I suppose.' He drew his garments about him and rose to his feet. 'I think I shall go down to the Pool again. Will you come too?'

With Mohan at his side, he went down the steps and moved across the lawn. His little figure, with the wind behind it, looked hardly more substantial than the brown leaves that were being swept along over the grass.

Damayanti gazed after him with troubled eyes, then turned to Jali. 'I noticed how thin he was the moment I arrived,' she said.

The young man frowned, began to speak, then checked himself. He was unwilling to give utterance to his fears, which were vague and of recent birth.

They were now alone together, Savitri and Rabindra having gone off on some errand of their own. Jali's eyes wandered over Damayanti wonderingly; it seemed to him that instead of having become different because of all that he had learnt about her, she was to him now even more completely the person that he had always known. For a while they both mused in silence; and when they began to talk again, he found himself telling her all that was in his mind: how that in his deepened understanding of her he loved her

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much more — oh yes, much more! — but less painfully. And all this came easily, without any shadow of constraint.

Then she talked to him about her father. The Rajah had died, she said, with serenity, the angers and rancours of his past life forgotten, or at any rate, completely dismissed. 'He never mentioned the Guru, and, although he spoke very little of Mohan or Savitri, I knew that he had become reconciled to my having a life with them, and apart from him. We talked chiefly about our own past together, about early days — remembering what they had had of real happiness and beauty — for they did contain happiness and beauty — oh yes, quite a lot!' Tears came into her eyes and she turned her head away.

Two hours or more had gone by when Rabindra appeared in the doorway to remind them that a meal was waiting for them indoors. Damayanti passed her hand over her forehead, then sighed and prepared to get up.

'Where is Savitri?' she cried. 'And Mohan? Is he still at the Pool with the Guru?'

Before Rabindra could answer Savitri came running up the steps. Her expression was solemn, and in her hand she held a letter. 'A messenger has just come. He says he's from Agra, and he gave me this' — she went up to Jali — 'for you.'

Jali took the letter and looked down at it for a moment in silence. Then, raising his eyes to Damayanti, he said: 'I think I can guess what is here.'

For a moment no one moved, then he broke the seal, and immediately nodded his head. 'Yes — I must go. My mother will be arriving quite soon. I shall have to start to-day.'

'To-day?'

He thought for a minute, and at last drew a long breath. 'This evening. There will be a moon and I can ride all night.'

After a brief meal, he went up to his room to pack. Mohan and the Guru had not yet appeared, and their absence contributed to the preoccupation which rested like a cloud upon everyone. Several times Jali went to his window and stood there, hoping to see Mohan coming back across the lawn. The Guru often went without his rice, or had it brought to him by the Pool; but why had Mohan remained away so long?

The lawn with the trees beyond, this room with its simple furni-

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ture and a few books — these, he reflected, made surroundings that were wholly satisfying. Here at Hawa Ghar there was a correspondence between outward things and the inner landscape of his mind. To leave this place made him sad, but he was not so sad as he might have been. He had a sense of security; he saw the complications of the world as artificialities painted over the true forms of life. And the contemplation of those forms brought comfort. 'Whatever happens,' he said to himself, 'I shall come back to Hawa Ghar.'

His packing finished, he went downstairs, and stepping out into the veranda, found Damayanti there. She was sitting quite still in the corner, nor did she make the smallest stir as he approached.

'Has Mohan come back?' he asked.

'Yes, some time ago. — We have just been talking.'

He sat down.

Her eyes met his with the fixed, unresponsive stare that they sometimes had in moments of stress, and he now noticed traces of recent tears. 'The Guru is not well,' she said. 'He has not been well for the last month.'

At these words a fear, which he half recognized, crept out of its hiding-place again and raised its head. But he refused to look at it. 'No, no!' he cried within himself. 'It can't be anything serious!' How could it be, when the Guru during all these last weeks had been gayer, more lighthearted, than ever before. He had idled and laughed with Savitri; he had . . .

These unuttered cries of protest died away, for all at once he saw that Damayanti had begun to cry.

'Jali! Are you there?' In a voice that was slightly unnatural, Mohan was calling to him from the hall.

He got up and left the veranda without another word. The other was waiting by the front door. Without looking at him, 'Come out for a moment!' Mohan said. 'There is something I want to tell you.'

They went out together and began to walk rapidly along the familiar path over the plain. His eyes fixed on the ground, Jali said: 'It's about the Guru, isn't it? Is he very ill?'

'Yes. He thinks that two or three weeks is all he has left.'

'Two or three weeks! But . . .'

Mohan drew in his breath. 'I know. I could hardly believe it. But he wouldn't say it if he wasn't sure.'



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'No,' murmured Jali, and spoke no more.

Each following his own thoughts, they strode on, side by side. On reaching the big white stone, they climbed up on to it, and gazed out, this way and that, over the plain. The sun now low in the sky was flooding the grass with golden light. They gazed before them without seeing anything, then came down and began to walk back.

Presently Mohan repeated what the Guru had said. It appeared that in one of the riots at Daulatpur he had received a blow in the side. Ever since then he had been unwell, and some weeks ago he had recognized his illness and realized that his days were numbered. No food that he ate was able to nourish him now; indeed, it went better with him if he did not eat at all.

On getting back to the house they looked into the veranda, but Damayanti was no longer there.

'She must have gone down to the Pool,' said Mohan, and he paused.

Jali's eyes were fastened upon the fringe of trees. 'I think,' he said slowly, 'I think I shall go to them and say good-bye; and then — and then I shall start.'

Mohan gave him a long, unhappy look. 'You must do as you think best,' he replied in a low voice; and for a minute neither of them moved. 'Jali,' he murmured, 'I'm sorry you are going.'

With that they turned away from each other, and Jali walked slowly over the lawn towards the wood.

'I think I'll ride with you to the edge of the plateau,' Mohan called after him. 'Do you mind?'

Jali looked round, smiled, and went on. In the wood it was shady and still. He stared about him, and while one part of his mind was noticing how the red sunlight struck through on to the trunks of the trees, another part was flooded by strangely inconsequent recollections. All at once there rose up before him a picture of Hari lying on his funeral pyre. Hari's face had worn a look of disdainful calm, which had never been on it in life. The wind had blown the flames this way and that at first, but after a while they had gained strength and gone up fierce and straight into the sky. And then the rain, which had been holding off all the afternoon, had come down in torrents; but, luckily, not until all was finished.

On reaching the gate he paused for a minute and listened for the sound of voices. But none was to be heard. There was no sound

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but a faint rustle of wind in the tops of the trees, and at this sound a wave of unbearable sadness swept over him. It was a sadness deeper than any he had known before. But after a while it spent itself; and he opened the gate and went in.

There in his corner sat the Guru. He was leaning back against the wall with his hands lying idle on his lap. Sitting on the ground at his feet was Damayanti, one arm thrown up along the seat and her head resting against it.

He went up to them. 'I have come to say good-bye,' he said, and they looked up at him and smiled as if they understood everything that was in his heart. Then he prostrated himself in the prescribed fashion before the Guru and received his blessing; and after that, turning to Damayanti, he saluted her and said farewell. But she, having risen, took a necklace from her neck and put it round his.

'You will come back soon,' she said.

'Yes. I will come back.'

But, as he walked away, he thought: 'If only I could be sure!'

At the gate he looked round at the scene for the sake of a last memory. The two were now again in the same position as before. He looked down at Vishnu and up at the passing clouds. The clouds, he thought, were gone in a breath, and human beings in only a few breaths more. Only Vishnu remained. Vishnu would certainly be there for him, if ever he came back.

Three days later he was standing on a balcony of the Old Palace at Agra with the great plain stretched out beneath him. It was near the hour of sunset, and he had heard that his mother would arrive before dark. The road by which she would come lay through those green fields; it was the same by which he had come with her and his father on first leaving home as a child.

He turned, his eyes wandering over the grey wall of the Palace. Little balconies projected here and there, and one of them, he reflected, must be the balcony of his former room, for this view was the view that he so exactly remembered. The same red glitter of sunset lay upon the river below; across the water were the same dark groves alternating with sun-bathed patches of millet and corn. And beyond stretched the desert.

His thoughts went back to his mother. He pictured her as she had looked that evening when she had come into his room to bid

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him good-night. Life then had seemed to her so full of promise; and of that how much was to be unfulfilled! Sharply he drew in his breath, thinking of the blow he had to deal her.

In memory he turned to his father. Where was Rajah Amar now? Was a ghost now standing where the man had once stood — in the obscurity of the room behind him? 'No, I am the ghost,' he thought, 'the revisiting spirit! And here I stand once again, suspended between the past and the future.'

But he smiled as he said this, his thoughts turning to the Guru.





